"Margiad Evans : body, book and identity : an analysis of the novels and autobiographical texts"

Thesis

Margiad Evans: Body, Book and Identity. An Analysis of the Novels and Autobiographical Texts

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Introduction

'Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works'[1].

'I wish they would read to the end. Maybe they would find a line of their own likeness, though no one is in my mind as I draw it. I own that *I* am here'[2].

This thesis sets out to find Margiad Evans in her works. To this end, I examine the novels and autobiographical texts in order to provide a detailed account of the relationship between the life and the work, demonstrating how Evans's texts offer insights into the nature of autobiographical writing and how, with her pathographical text, *A Ray of Darkness,* she provides one of the earliest examples of the genre. What emerges is a writer whose texts have some affinities with the spirit of both Modernism and Postmodernism. Fundamental to this study is an analysis of Evans's unpublished texts and personal writing, including letters and journals, which together with the published texts, illustrate how she locates and constructs an identity for herself through writing.

Margiad Evans was born Peggy Whistler on March 17th 1909 and died of a brain tumour on her forty ninth birthday; for the last nine years of her life she suffered from epileptic seizures which became increasingly severe. She wrote prolifically throughout her life. She published four novels: *Country Dance* (1932); *The Wooden Doctor* (1933); *Turf or Stone* (1934) and *Creed* (1936). These were followed by *Autobiography* (1943), a volume of poetry, *Poems from Obscurity* (1947), and a collection of short stories, *The Old and the Young* (1948). After her illness was diagnosed in 1950 she published *A Ray of Darkness* (1952) in which she describes the onset of epilepsy and its treatment. Her

[1] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1928; repr. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2003), p.103.
[2] Margiad Evans, *Creed* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), p.170.
Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

last published book was another short volume of poems, *A Candle Ahead* (1956). Additional unpublished texts held in an extensive archive in the National Library of Wales[3], include a sequel to *A Ray of Darkness* entitled *The Nightingale Silenced* (1954-5)[4]; a memoir of childhood, *The Immortal Hospital* (1957)[5]; and *The Churstons* (1956-7)[6], which is part fiction, part autobiography.

Margiad Evans is a relatively neglected writer and there is comparatively little critical material devoted to her. In 1950, Derek Savage included a chapter on Evans in his survey of the contemporary novel, *The Withered Branch: Six Studies in the Modern Novel*[7]. Savage concludes that *Autobiography* marks the summit of Evans's development to date and he locates her firmly in what he discerns as 'a peculiar and distinctive cult of nature'[8]. There are two biographies, Moira Dearnley's *Margiad Evans*[9] and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan's, *Margiad Evans*[10], each of which includes brief commentaries on the texts. Sue Asbee has written an introduction to the new edition of *The Wooden Doctor*[11], an article which appeared in *Welsh Writing in English*, (2004) entitled, 'Margiad Evans's *The Wooden Doctor*: Illness and Sexuality' and an essay on the illness narratives, '" To write a great story": Margiad Evans's Illness Narratives'[12]. Barbara Prys-Williams has a chapter on Evans in *Twentieth-Century Autobiography: Writing Wales in English* entitled 'Writing it Out: Margiad Evans'[13]. All these critics point to relationships between Evans's life and her texts. Prys-Williams uses

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[3] Department of Manuscripts and Records, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth: Margiad Evans Manuscripts; NLW MSS 23357-74, 23577C; Margiad Evans papers.
[4] NLW, MS 23367B and 23368B.
[5] NLW, MS 23369C.
[6] NLW, Margiad Evans MSS 19,21; MSS 23361A, 23363C.
[7] Derek Savage, *The Withered Branch: Six Studies in the Modern Novel* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950).
[8] Savage, p.106.
[9] Moira Dearnley *Margiad Evans* (Cardiff: The University of Wales Press, 1982).
[10] Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan's, *Margiad Evans* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998).
[11] Margiad Evans,*The Wooden Doctor* (Wales: Honno, 2005).
[12] Sue Asbee, '"To write a great story": Margiad Evans's Illness Narratives' in *The Patient: Probing the Interdisciplinary Boundaries*'eds. Aleksandra Bartoszko and Maria Vaccarella (Witney: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2011), Ebook, available at www.interdisciplinarypress.net/publishing/id-press/ebooks/the-patient/ (25.11.11)
[13] Barbara Prys-Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography: Writing Wales in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp.32-57.

psychoanalytic theorists including Freud and Klein as well as Bowlby's attachment theory to explicate Evans's autobiographical writing. My thesis develops some of Prys-Williams's ideas and extends them to encompass the fictional as well as the non-fictional texts while giving fuller readings of the autobiographical texts than the scope of her chapter allows. Clare Morgan, in her article, 'Exile and the Kingdom: Margiad Evans and the Mythic Landscape of Wales', argues that Evans is first and foremost an English Romantic writer concerned with the idea of the sublime in nature[14]. While Morgan and Prys-Williams see Evans in relation to a Welsh writing tradition, my thesis points to her relevance in a wider context. Sue Asbee's essay on the illness narratives provides useful insights, which I have developed in this first extended analysis of Evans's pathographies.

Evans's work is primarily concerned with the locus of identity, which she explores in relation to nationality, gender, language and the body. In her writing she adopts multiple identities, continually implicating herself in her texts through the use of multiple personae and the interweaving of 'truth' and fiction. In Evans's writing the boundaries between genres are permeable: fact and fiction meld into one another so that the border is indistinct to the reader, and sometimes, it would appear to the author herself. Her first novel, *Country Dance,* is presented as factual having its origins in the central character's diary which the author has discovered, while her second, *The Wooden Doctor*, presented as fiction, is heavily drawn from the verifiable facts of her own life. Of course, this raises the question of how far the self Evans created in her diaries was also a construct, especially as she refers to herself in them variously as Peggy, her given name, Margiad, her nom de plume and, significantly Arabella, the name of the central character in *The Wooden Doctor.* However, as Robert Fothergill remarks, 'Even in their disguises, evasions and lies diarists are responding to the

[14] Clare Morgan, 'Exile and the Kingdom: Margiad Evans and the Mythic Landscape of Wales', *Welsh Writing in English,* 6 (2000), pp.89-118.

pressure of first-hand experience; they are being, for better or worse, themselves'[15]. I will suggest that in her diaries Peggy is being herselves.

Margiad Evans is always her own subject, in both fiction and non fiction, but the self she portrays is repeatedly reinvented. It is a work in progress. In *Country Dance* the author provides the Introduction and Conclusion to the fictional diary she presents as fact. In *The Wooden Doctor* characters and experiences narrated in her journals are offered as fiction. In *Turf or Stone* her lived experience provides the raw material for the account of illness, the character of Matt, the alcoholic father and Phoebe, the sensitive, adolescent observer of the action. In *Creed* themes from the life again surface: illness, a drunken parent, a doomed affair. In her fictional texts, Evans recreates her own experiences; characters share her emotions and obsessions enabling her to explore aspects of her life and identity thinly disguised to her reader, and perhaps herself, as 'fiction'.

One identity she passionately wishes to espouse is that of 'author' and much of her writing is concerned with the creation and affirmation of herself as such and the difficulties she encounters with language in her attempts to translate thought into words. Paradoxically perhaps, as well as giving birth to Margiad Evans, the writer, fashioned from language, her 'corpus' is deeply implicated in an awareness of the body and it is clear that her sense of self is intimately bound up with her bodily experiences. The semiotics of the body, especially the suffering body, feature in all the fictional texts and, of course, become central in the late pathographical writing.

Her accounts of the catastrophe of her first major seizure, its aftermath, the diagnosis of epilepsy, its treatment and her continued suffering are the subject of *A Ray of Darkness* and *The Nightingale Silenced.* According to the model outlined by Arthur

[15] Robert A. Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.10.

Frank, these texts can be described as both post-modern and post-colonial[16]. Talcott Parsons, writing in the 1950s, drew attention the Modernist requirement that an ill person should surrender herself to the care of her physician. Frank suggests that this is a 'narrative surrender'[17]. In Parsons' model the physician tells the story of the disease; in telling her story the sick person simply repeats the doctor's words. In contrast, Frank argues that the post-modern position reflects the desire of individuals to reclaim their illness and to give voice to their own story[18]. According to Frank, the desire to reclaim one's story is also a post-colonial position[19]. Seen in this context, Evans's pathographies, her autobiographical accounts of her disease and its treatment, can be seen as her reactions to her colonisation both by the disease itself and the medical regimes designed to manage it.

Evans was also preoccupied with the body's mortality and this provides a further incentive for her late writing. As her body fails the book is needed to stand, first in place of the ailing body and then, after death, as a lasting testimony to the life. The body is finally replaced by text, by words. There is an acknowledgement of language's inability to speak the unspeakable nature of her experience of the seizures which overwhelm her, but there is a real sense that if she continued to write, then despite her inability to control her body, her identity would not be lost.

I have used some aspects of autobiographical and psychoanalytic theory to explore the themes identified above. Of course these two approaches are linked because both rely on the idea of the individual creating a narrative of their past and the role of language in the creation of identity. As the philosopher Jay Bernstein has remarked, 'at

[16] Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).
[17] Ibid. p.6.
[18] Ibid. p.7.
[19] Ibid. p.13.

bottom, psychoanalytic self transformation is a form of theory-mediated autobiography'[20].

In the 1970s deconstructionist critics, for example Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and De Man worked towards the conclusion that the autobiographical project was an impossibility because it relies on the idea of a coherent self that could be referred to as the subject of the text. Having denied the reality of a self, autobiography becomes the pursuit of an illusion and the self it describes a fiction. Laura Marcus summarises their belief that, '...the self is only discovered through its writing of itself and only exists as an effect of writing'[21]. If the self is only revealed through discourse this means that an examination of the writing must go some way towards revealing the individual. Furthermore as Paul John Eakin suggests,

> If the premise that we can move from knowledge of a text to knowledge of the self proves to be a fiction – the text becomes paradoxically not less precious but more: in making the text the autobiographer constructs a self that would not otherwise exist [22].

Derrida and Lacan see the self as a fiction constituted in discourse which for them is a 'hypothetical place or space for story telling'[23]. It is the stories Evans tells in this space, both those she acknowledges as autobiography and those she offers as fiction and the selves that she constructs in them which is the subject of this thesis.

Later autobiographical theorists such as Paul John Eakin, Paul Jay and James Olney emphasise the performative nature of autobiographical writing, by which they mean that writers construct their identities in the process of the writing. Paul Jay cites de Man:

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[20] Jay Bernstein, 'Self-Knowledge as Praxis: Narrative and Narration in Psychoanalysis', in *Narrative in Culture,* ed. Cristopher Nash (London: Routledge, 1980), pp.51-80.
[21] Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory Criticism Practice* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.243.
[22] Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self- Invention* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), p.26.
[23] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis and London: Minneapolis University Press, 2001), p.132.

> We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life[24].

Perhaps this is why many writers ignore the deconstructionist view that the autobiographical project is futile and instead acquiesce to what in some cases seems a powerful imperative to provide stories of their lives and by doing so construct the life. Acknowledging this urge to autobiography, Eakin seeks to accommodate the idea of the fictionality of the autobiographical 'I'; he argues that such 'fictions', the stories the individual tells about his/her life and identity should be understood as the truth of that life or self. Eakin does not mean that the autobiographer creates a fictional persona. Instead, using theories of language acquisition and psychoanalytic accounts of the formation of identity he suggests that narrative forms are a constitutive element of human identity [25]. Rather than pointing to the death of autobiography because of the absence of the self, Eakin, Olney and Jay suggest the value of autobiography in being the instrument of the creation of identity. As opposed to a view of autobiography as a kind of 'funerary architecture'[26], as deconstructionist critics would have it, I suggest that it would be more appropriate to conceptualise autobiography as a womb in which memory and imagination work together towards the creation and growth of a self.

The difficulty of distinguishing between fact and fiction in Evans's autobiographical texts and in her autobiographical fiction is rendered less problematical if one bears in mind Eakin's suggestion that there is little point in the attempt to distinguish fact from fiction if one accepts his premise that human identity is made up of narrative forms[27]. Paul Jay articulates a similar position:

> the attempt to differentiate between autobiography and fictional autobiography is finally pointless. For if by 'fictional' we mean 'made up', 'created' or

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[24] Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement' in *MLN* 94 (December 1979), 920.
[25] Eakin (1985), p.3.
[26] Marcus, p.209.
[27] Eakin (1985), p.3.

'imagined' – something that is, which is literary and not 'real' –then we have merely defined the ontological status of any text, autobiographical or not[28].

Both Paul Jay in *Being in the Text* and Suzanne Nalbantian in *Aesthetic Autobiography* analyse the work of a number of authors who have taken the material of their lives and fashioned it in the 'womb' of their imaginations into art and by doing so become the artists they aspired to be[29]. As Jay suggests 'the growth of the poet's mind' is the story of *The Prelude,* but the development of the poet can best be observed in 'the process of the poem's composition'[30]. *The Prelude* illustrates how the power of the poet's creative use of language to transform the past helps transform the autobiographical protagonist who is the poem's subject. Similarly, Jay points to how Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 'realised that by writing about his growth as an artist he might become one'[31]. Joyce's novel dramatises the reality of his past in a fictional reconstruction so that truth becomes associated with fictionalising rather than remembering. These ideas are especially helpful in illuminating Evans's second novel, *The Wooden Doctor* (1933), which includes a fictionalised account of the writing of Evans's first novel, *Country Dance* (1932). Arabella, her alter ego, says:

> I wrote for my distraction, using as a background the countryside in which I had grown up: my characters I had known since childhood. Gradually my creations, these puppets with a strange wilful life of their own, took complete possession of my imagination. I could not tell where truth ended and fiction began; I discovered what a pleasure I could find in blending the two[32].

The characters are 'true' in that they are based on people she has known, and yet they are also her creations; more than that, they have a 'strange wilful life of their own'.

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[28] Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.16.
[29] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (First published 1914-15; repr. London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.236.
[30] Jay, p.33.
[31] Ibid. p.120.
[32] Margiad Evans, *The Wooden Doctor* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1933; repr. Dinas Powys: Honno, 2005), p.126.
Further references to the Honno edition are given after quotations in the text.

In the unpublished MS version of *The Wooden Doctor*, Arabella recalls how, as children, she and her sister thought all books contained the truth, '*Pride and Prejudice* was fact as much as the Encyclopeadia [*sic*]'[33]. She follows this with the remark that her sister told her long afterwards that:

> The discovery of fiction reminded her of the first time she had looked in a mirror. "I don't know why Arabella, but I had always thought I was quite pretty in spite of what everybody said. I was horrified at my appearance"[34].

In the author's mind the discovery that books might be works of the imagination is linked with a realisation of the individual's ability to create a fiction from themselves.

The name is also important here. Arabella, the name of the heroine of *The Wooden Doctor*, is also a name Peggy uses to refer to herself repeatedly in her Journals; indeed her Journal for 1935-9 is given the title, 'Arabella's Voice'[35]. Names are important in discussions about the autobiographical self. For Foucault, 'the name of an author is not precisely a proper name among others...Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification'[36]. In other words, if the name of the author and the name of the protagonist are the same then what follows can be categorised as autobiography. Evans frustrates this endeavour by assigning her volumes of autobiography to her 'writerly' self, who has a 'fictional' name, and using one of her adopted names for the heroine of her 'fiction'. So the 'real' person evades both the reader, and also, one suspects, the writer.

Suzanne Nalbantian's theory of 'aesthetic autobiography' has developed from her analysis of how Proust, Joyce, Woolf and Nin transform their experience into fiction. Her ideas, especially her chapter on Virginia Woolf, provide a useful

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[33] Margiad Evans, NLW MS 23357B p.78.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Margiad Evans, *Arabella's Voice,* NLW, MS 23577C.
[36] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp.122-3.

perspective for reading Evan's fictional texts. There are many parallels between Woolf and Evans as will become apparent in the chapters which follow. Both were inveterate writers; both wrote about the experience of illness and both were concerned with the relationship between art and life. In her Introduction to the 1928 American edition of *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf expressed her perception of the complexities surrounding concepts of 'truth' and 'fiction':

> For nothing is more fascinating than to be shown the truth which lies behind those immense facades of fiction – if life is indeed true, and if fiction is indeed fictitious. And probably the connection between the two is highly complicated[37].

Nalbantian suggests that 'the autobiographical was Woolf's medium for creativity' and that in her novels she amplifies her experiences and relationships[38]. The same could be said of Evans.

Nalbantian argues that in the characters of Mrs Dalloway and Lily Briscoe Woolf includes elements of herself, the former conveying her social side and the latter, the artistic. Furthermore, Nalbantian argues that in Mrs Dalloway Woolf creates a character who features in and develops throughout her oeuvre, appearing as a 'haunting presence' in *The Voyage Out,* then eight years later in a germinal story 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond St.', thereafter surfacing as a title character in the novel *Mrs Dalloway* in which a much more complex personality emerges[39]. In this novel Woolf transfers the suicidal element of her own personality onto Septimus Warren Smith, allowing Mrs Dalloway to survive and to transmute into other versions of herself in subsequent fictions. By endowing her characters with traces of her own obsessions she was able to explore their consequences beyond the scope of her own behaviour.

Nalbantian also suggests that:

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[37] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (New York, NY: Modern Library Inc, 1928), p.vi.
[38] Suzanne Nalbantian, *Aesthetic Autobiography: From Life to Art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994) p.136.
[39] Nalbantian, p.58.

> ...fearful of drowning in her personal emotions...[Woolf] used analogy and substitution to transform her life ingredients. Ever on the verge of madness, she tried to control and fight off her obsessions by transferring them onto the abstractions and creative ambiguity of her fiction [40].

Evans's journals from the 1930s reveal a volatile individual who is often very emotional and whose relationships and day to day life are reported in highly dramatic terms. As with Woolf, the process of creation, how these febrile states are transmuted into art, can be traced by reference to Evans's personal writings: her journals, notebooks, letters and drafts. Throughout this thesis Woolf provides an example of a Modernist woman writer roughly contemporary with Evans who had similar interests in the representation of illness and consciousness and for whom writing was frequently therapeutic and informed by personal experiences.

There are two other main strands of autobiographical theory which inform this thesis. The first is that which examines the role of the body in the construction of identity. The body as a source of knowledge, intimately bound up with identity, is a subject that has preoccupied feminist theorists, in particular those who resist cultural notions of the self as constituted entirely in language. Shirley Neuman explains what she sees as the effacement of bodies in autobiography by referring back to the Platonic tradition which opposed the spiritual and the corporal and sited the self in the spiritual realm[41]. According to Neuman, Enlightenment thinking embraced Cartesian dualism according to which man's whole nature was constituted by his ability to think, without reference to or the necessity of a material body. In a further dichotomy based on such thinking soul or intellect was identified as male while inferior matters of the body were identified as female. The body, especially the female body, constructed as frail, imperfect, unruly and ungovernable, was seen as the enemy of reason.

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[40] Nalbantian, p.60.

[41] Shirley Neuman, 'An appearance walking in a forest the sexes burn: Autobiography and the Construction of the Feminine Body', in Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, Gerald Peters, *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p.293.

Current neurobiological thinking and recent feminist criticism both take issue with this view. Paul John Eakin has become convinced by recent neurobiological and psychological research that 'some modes of self-experience' are pre-linguistic. He quotes the neurologist Antonio Damasio who argues that self is not an effect of language but an effect of the neurological structure of the brain[42]. The self then is biologically constituted, not simply an effect of language. According to Eakin 'self' is Damasio's name for the body's awareness or knowledge of its encounters with its environment and its responses to its own changing internal states. 'To be conscious is to be endowed with this feeling of knowing that is self'[43]. Without this the self is severely compromised. My reading of Evans's texts leads me to the conviction that although she was using language to create multiple identities for herself, this process was always mediated by her sense of herself as embodied. It is the particular interest of this study to analyse the writer's response when her body lies beyond the control of her brain. Pertinently, Damasio uses the example of a man undergoing epileptic absence seizures to illustrate his point:

> He was both there and not there, certainly awake, attentive in part, behaving for sure, bodily present but personally unaccounted for, absent without leave...I had witnessed the razor-sharp transition between a fully conscious mind and a mind deprived of the sense of self[44].

As I will describe in Chapter 3, one of Evans's characters suffers this experience and in Chapter 5, which looks at Evans's published and unpublished autobiographical texts, I will show how this was based on her own experience of such moments which pre-dated the onset of major epilepsy in 1950.

Even before the onset of epilepsy, however, Evans's writing already displays a keen awareness of the body. And here I believe that feminist theorists of the body can

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[42] Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), p.67.
[43] Ibid. p.68.
[44] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), pp.6-7.

be used to illuminate my reading of her texts. Smith and Watson describe the body as 'a site of autobiographical knowledge, as well as a textual surface upon which a person's life is inscribed'[45]. In Evans's fiction the body often speaks what cannot be articulated in language; the body becomes the text.

Theories of embodiment have, over the last few years, rescued the body from portrayal as machine and moved towards a celebration of corporeality as the basis of the self. One such theorist is Elizabeth Grosz[46] who says in her Introduction to *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), 'This book is a refiguring of the body so that it moves from the periphery to the center of analysis, so that it can now be understood as the very "stuff" of subjectivity'[47]. Grosz, drawing on Kristeva's notion of the abject, analyses the ways in which the body may spill over into the world. Grosz's model of the abject will be used to frame Evans's portrayal of her female characters' responses to puberty as well as asking whether this is a useful way of theorising Evans's own response to her uncontrollable body as it suffers major and terrifying seizures[48].

Evans's body is a body in pain; I have used Elaine Scarry's ideas in her book of the same name to look at how the body attempts to communicate its pain. She also suggests the relationship between pain and sin which is linked to the Christian perception of a dichotomy between the immortal soul and the mortal body associated with sin. In the Middle Ages, lechery and covetousness were thought to result in the body of the sinner suffering the scourge of leprosy, 'a corporeal signifier of sin'[49]. As Susan Sontag points out, public perception of the AIDs virus as punishment for the 'sin' of homosexuality illustrates the fact that such thinking is current. Evans meditates about

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[45] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, p.37.
[46] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).
[47] Ibid. p.ix.
[48] Ibid. pp.192-3.
[49] Ibid. p.6.

whether her epilepsy, once regarded as the signifier of demonic possession, is such a punishment.

In the texts which Evans acknowledges explicitly as autobiography, the body remains centre stage. In *Autobiography* she is exercised by the relationship of her body to the earth; *A Ray of Darkness* is autopathography, the story of the onset of her epilepsy. To illuminate the latter I have used the three principal theorists of this branch of autobiography: Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, Arthur Frank and Thomas Couser, as well as Susan Sontag. None of them analyses Evans's text themselves and I suspect were not aware of it, but they make some points about the genre which allow *A Ray of Darkness,* and its unpublished sequel, *The Nightingale Silenced*, to be set in context. Frank and Sontag write from personal experience of serious illness, but Evans differs from them in that hers is a neurological disease and for this reason, I would argue, especially interesting in its effects on her self-perception and her attempts to write as a means of saving that self.

Autobiography can be seen as an unconscious attempt to create an illusion of wholeness and coherence from the reality of a self which is fragmented and chaotic. This is a continuation of Lacan's 'mirror stage' of child development in which the infant internalises a false image of a coherent self[50]. It has been suggested that it is necessary for the individual to maintain this illusion in order to function. This task becomes the more urgent when the individual is aware that her self is threatened, that her identity may be lost through the catastrophe of a malfunction of the brain. I will argue that the resulting autobiography is Evans's attempt to restore herself, to recreate herself through writing and that the resulting text is one of the earliest examples of autopathography, a genre which has proliferated in the late twentieth and early twenty

[50] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits,* a selection translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (First pub. Éditions du Seuil, 1966; First translation, Tavistock, 1977; repr. London: Routledge, 1997), pp.1-7.

first centuries with the popularity of cancer journals and other personal narratives of illness.

Pathography insists on the place of the body in the creation of identity because as Suzanne Egan remarks, 'the crises that generate autobiography may begin with the body; suffering, illness and death go to work on the body and determine its narratives'[51]. In reading Evans's accounts of her illness I have found theorists of the body and approaches focussing on social and historical conditions more convincing than the deconstructive vision of self as a construct of language in an impersonal and autonomous system. For example, the sociologist Arthur Frank has much to say on the importance of the body in the location of identity and how the ill person has to renegotiate their identity through storytelling. He asserts that, 'The stories that ill people tell come out of their bodies. The body sets in motion the need for new stories when its disease disrupts the old stories'[52]. This is fundamental to my discussion of *A Ray of Darkness.*

Anne Hunsaker Hawkins cogently argues that, 'Pathography challenges the scepticism of critics and theorists about the self, making that scepticism seem artificial, mandarin and contrived'[53]. Hawkins' concept of illness narratives as a modern, secular reworking of the autobiographies of religious conversion popular in the seventeenth century, as well as her examination of the metaphors of pathography as myths of journey or battle will also illuminate my analysis of Evans's language in *A Ray of Darkness*. My reading of Evans's texts leads me to agree with Hawkins' speculation that, 'Perhaps it is true, as Freud maintained, that the ego is first and foremost a bodily

[51] Suzanne Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p.7.
[52] Frank, p.2.
[53] Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), p.17.

ego and that "self" is bound up with the biological integrity of the body'[54]. My reading of Evans's late texts in Chapters 5 and 6 will show how I have arrived at this conclusion.

Thomas Couser, acknowledging the work of Frank and Hawkins in what he calls 'this orphan genre'[55], coins the term 'autopathography' to cover autobiographical illness narratives written when bodily dysfunction heightens the individual's awareness of her mortality, threatening identity and disrupting the apparent plot of her life[56]. Couser sees these narratives as opportunities to explore the ways in which the body mediates identity or personality. I will explore in Chapter 5 how Evans struggles to make sense of the particular disease which afflicts her and its effect on her sense of self; she meditates on its meaning, asking whether she is somehow responsible for her own suffering. As Couser points out, Western culture has not been kind in its treatment of disability, often seeing it as the outward sign of God's displeasure[57]. Evans's awareness that in the past seizures were seen as signs of demonic possession increases her sense of guilt.

Evans's illness narratives will be explored in the light of Couser's suggestion that:

> If the threat of meaninglessness is the most profound threat posed by illness, disability or other bodily injury, by organising the experience of bodily dysfunction in coherent ways narratives of illness promise to restore or shore up our sense of the integrity and value of our lives[58].

Suzanne Egan suggests that 'the spectre of death hovers over all autobiography' which becomes an attempt to control the uncontrollable: the end of the story[59]. She invents the term 'autothanatography' for those stories written by the terminally ill. Evans did not

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[54] Hawkins, p.17
[55] G. Thomas Couser, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability and Life Writing* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p.13.
[56] Ibid. p.5.
[57] Couser, p.181.
[58] Couser, p.295.
[59] Egan, p.196.

know that her epilepsy was caused by an inoperable brain tumour when she wrote *A Ray of Darkness*, but death, as Derek Savage commented, is a dark presence in all her writing and became more so as her disease progressed, as is evident both in *A Ray of Darkness* and its unpublished sequel, *The Nightingale Silenced.* These texts illustrate Evans's deep desire to leave something of herself in the world; an awareness that her written corpus will live on after the death of her body.

My approach to Evans's texts, therefore, is informed by a theoretical position which is alive to the difficulty of fixing a boundary between fiction and autobiography and which sees in writing the opportunity for the writer to construct an identity for herself. I also locate Evans's texts within the Modernist tradition, and within a feminist theoretical endeavour to articulate both the significance of the body and its relation to language. The latter has led me to identify psychoanalytic theories which complement autobiographical approaches in offering insights into Evans's writing. Several critics have noted the relationship between the practice of autobiography and Freudian psychoanalysis. Laura Marcus describes Freud's methodology as 'turning autobiography into science'. She suggests that 'there is a sense in which psychoanalysis is founded on the work of autobiography,' going on to point out that many of Freud's 'discoveries' were based `on his own memories, dreams and reflections[60]. As the autobiographer Elizabeth Wilson remarks, '...psychoanalysis was the mirror of the age. One always returned to Freud, for after all, he had invented a therapeutic method which explored the *narrative* that a life might be – identity as autobiography'[61].

Freud was indeed the mirror of Evans's age: a selection of his papers was first published in English in1909, the year of Evans's birth, although Havelock Ellis had frequently referred to his work in his earlier six volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*

[60] Marcus, p.82.
[61] Elizabeth Wilson, *Mirror Writing: An Autobiography* (London: Virago, 1982), p.136.

(1897-1910). Evans refers to Havelock Ellis in her journal of 1933 and several references in *A Ray of Darkness* (1952) make clear that she was familiar with some of Freud's ideas[62]. These ideas were hugely influential, both with the general public (apparently by the 1920s psychoanalysis had become 'an appalling craze'[63]) and writers, who were increasingly concerned in their novels with what Ford Madox Ford calls in *The Good Soldier* 'that mysterious and unconscious self that underlies most people'[64].

The discovery of that self for a therapeutic purpose was Freud's aim in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis emphasises and credits the truth of the patient's unconscious narratives; as Juliet Mitchell puts it, Freud 'first believed that the stories [told to him by his patients in psychoanalysis] were true and then that they were true as stories'[65]. Freud shows that the self is made up of 'tales and images which are already "literary" – imagistic and narrative fabrications woven from scraps of libidinally charged "truth"' [66]. As readers, the texts we value are those we believe to be true - as stories.

In its primary process, psychoanalysis is based on a literary exchange with the unconscious as text to be read. In a sense, the patient creates herself through the stories she tells to the analyst and the analyst contributes creatively to her patient's sense of self through her interpretation of those stories. It is essential that the analyst listens for moments of intensity; for ambiguities and for gaps and silences in the stories she hears. The analyst's silence, alive with attention, is crucial to the process because it calls upon the patient to evade the normal constraining power of resistance and repression and speak. Similarly, in my analysis of Evans's texts I have looked for the linguistic

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[62] Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness* (London: John Calder, 1978), p.33; p.50; pp.114-5.
[63] John Carruthers, *Scheherazade: or the Future of the English Novel* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1928), p.56.
[64] Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (First pub. 1915 rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.100.
[65] Juliet Mitchell, *Women - The Longest Revolution: Essays on Feminism, Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Virago, 1984), p.299.
[66] Linda Ruth Williams, *Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject* (London and New York: Hodder Headline, 1995), p.15.

symptoms of unconscious processes: repetitions, evasions, gaps and changes of direction which point to a subtext which, like an unconscious wish, these texts both conceal and reveal.

Adopting a Freudian approach to these texts might be regarded as problematic, especially by some feminist critics. Many women unsurprisingly have difficulty with what they perceive as Freud's masculine bias, especially in his early models of human sexuality[67]. While recognising this I suggest that Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as illuminating the autobiographical process, offers interesting insights into Evans's work for two further reasons. Firstly, as Elizabeth Grosz recognises, 'Freud theorised the interface between soma and psyche'[68]. Freud's predominantly female patients presented with somatic symptoms which he related to their mental states as revealed to him through their stories. Freud recognised the 'literariness' of this interaction and his indebtedness to poets and novelists:

> The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection[69].

The relationship between bodily suffering and mental states is an important feature of Evans's stories. In *The Wooden Doctor* Arabella's cystitis can be seen in the same light as Freud viewed Dora's cough: as the body speaking what otherwise cannot be articulated.

Secondly, Freud's theories emphasise the importance of childhood, seeing it as formative; he suggested that the individual could heal herself by a retreat to early experience. Both Evans's autobiographical and fictional texts include representations of

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[67] Sigmund Freud, translated from the German by James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* henceforth *SE* (First pub. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1963; repr. 1991) 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes' in *SE* XIX (1923-25), pp.241-258.

[68] Grosz, p.28.

[69] Sigmund Freud (with J. Breuer), *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), in *SE* II, pp.160-1.

childhood and adolescence. In her unpublished memoir of childhood, *The Immortal Hospital*, she describes a moment of epiphany by the River Wye which established for her a sense of place which became inseparably linked to her sense of self[70]. Her novels explore the sensibilities of the adolescent girl coming to terms with her developing body and her aberrant emotions and, in her late autobiographical writing, she returns again to the scenes of her childhood in an attempt to find herself when disintegration threatens, and to provide a legacy for her daughter.

Following Freud, post-Freudian object relations theorists Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott have also been helpful in illuminating relationship issues, in particular with regard to the impact on a child of inadequate parenting, a thread that runs persistently through the novels. I have also made use of the theories of Jacques Lacan to explicate Evans's relationship to language and as a way of theorising the fragility of her self construct.

Lacan's account of the mirror or imaginary stage of human development has also led to an approach to autobiographical writing as either creating the illusion of a unified self or as revealing in its gaps and silences the fragmentation of the subject. Evans's pathography, *A Ray of Darkness*, illustrates its author's attempt to construct a coherent whole identity while revealing a subject radically split between body and mind; the writer and artist opposed to the housewife and mother.

The imaginary is the first in Lacan's tripartite formulation of human development[71]. The imaginary gives way to the symbolic which introduces the signifying power of language. The third state is the Real, that which falls outside the symbolic realm. The Real encompasses trauma and death, which for Lacan represents its eventual triumph. I have used Lacan's configuration of the Real to illuminate

[70] NLW, MS 23369C, pp.16-17.
[71] Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp.88-121. See also Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Gender: An Introductory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.146-8.

Evans's frequent representations of trauma and death in her texts, especially her late pathographies when she describes experiencing death's harbinger in the severe epileptic seizures which afflicted her and which would lead to her terminal diagnosis.

An insight into Evans's use of language is offered by relating it to the Lacanian concept of the symbolic. In this order, Lacan characterises language as an endless signifying chain driven by desire for the original lost object, the mother's body. For both Freud and Lacan, the gaps and silences in a text can be as illuminating as the words themselves. My reading of Evans's texts is attentive to her silences.

Object relations theorists, Klein and Winnicott, offer insights into the importance of the mother in the formation of identity; the mother/daughter relationship is a focus of all Evans's fiction. For these theorists, the mother replaces the mirror in reflecting back to the child a comforting image of coherence and wholeness. However, this is a complex and often problematic process as illustrated in a number of women's autobiographies, for example, Virginia Woolf's *A Sketch of the Past*, and, as I will argue, Evans's autobiographical fiction.

In the wake of Barthes' concept of the death of the author, biographical and Freudian approaches to literary texts became unfashionable, but they have never completely disappeared and indeed seem to be making a resurgence: Hermione Lee's Introduction to Woolf's *Moments of Being* (2002)[72] is a good example. Margiad Evans resembles Virginia Woolf in terms of her literary output: letters, journals, autobiography and personally inflected fictional texts, confessional novels which Shari Benstock labels 'autofiction'[73]. One of the attractions of psychoanalytic literary criticism is that it treats all these texts the same with regard to authorial intention. They are all stories arising from the life which simultaneously construct the life. As Suzette Henke suggests:

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[72] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, Introduced and Revised by Hermione Lee (London: Pimlico, 2002).
[73] Shari Benstock cited in Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Lives: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life – Writing* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), p.xiii.

> To a large extent, every autobiography imposes a narrative form on an otherwise formless and fragmented personal history and every novel contains shards of social, psychological and cultural history in the texture of its ostensibly mimetic world[74].

Both autobiography and psychoanalysis are based on the assumption that the stories of our lives are to be found by recovering and accessing the past, and that the resulting narrative becomes our identity. As the neurologist Oliver Sacks remarks, 'It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a "narrative", and that this narrative is us, our identities'[75].

Chapters 1-4 offer close readings of Evans's novels taken in chronological order. Chapter 1 deals with *Country Dance,* looking at how identity is linked to both nationality and gender and analysing how themes which are important in all her writing are introduced in this first short text. Chapter 2 explores *The Wooden Doctor* in terms of aesthetic autobiography and the growing importance of her construction of her identity as writer. Chapter 3 on *Turf or Stone* considers the importance for Evans of constructing characters with whom she could identify and explore aspects of herself, while Chapter 4 on *Creed* suggests that in this novel Evans, as well as analysing the impact of inadequate parenting on adult relationships, also offers a text which is aligned to the precepts of Modernism in being self-reflexively aware of its own construction. In all these chapters, material from Evan's personal journals will be used to show the complex ways in which her experiences offered raw material for her fiction. Close attention is also paid to her use of language and the literary influences on her writing. In Chapter 5, I will focus both on Evans's autobiographical text, *Autobiography*, and her autopathographies, *A Ray of Darkness* and the unpublished *The Nightingale Silenced.* In this chapter I will explore the progression from the earlier text, written before her first epileptic fit, to the later texts when, after diagnosis, her sense of herself is profoundly

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[74] Henke, p.xiv.
[75] Oliver Sacks, *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* (London: Picador, 1986), p.110.

threatened by her illness. The significance of writing to her as she comes to terms with this process is central to this chapter. Finally, Chapter 6 deals with Evans's late unpublished texts which are again largely autobiographical. In this chapter I will look at the significance of memory, and the importance of retaining the identity of the writer for Evans as she confronts the deterioration of her health and the prospect of death.

1

Country Dance: Identity, Nationality and Gender

Margiad Evans published her first novel, *Country Dance,* in 1932 when she was twenty-three. It is a short text and the story, set in 1850, is a simple one: Ann Goodman, daughter of the Anglo-Welsh marriage of Myfanwy and John, is courted by two men, Evan ap Evans, a Welshman, and Englishman, Gabriel Ford. Their rivalry for her affection ends in Ann's death at the hands of the man she rejects. The main body of the text is presented as Ann's diary which Evans claims to have found and for which the author simply provides an editorial Introduction and Conclusion. Evans writes in her Introduction, 'Chance threw me the facts and I grasped them with eagerness'[1]. Ann's diary, Evans asserts, gives her access to 'true knowledge' of an old tragedy, which has been 'tricked out and distorted by tradition' (p.vii).

Englishness and Welshness are set in opposition in the novel and Ann with her mixed blood is the pivot of the conflict. The action of *Country Dance* takes place on the border between England and Wales, near Ross-on-Wye, and moves backwards and forwards in a pattern which mirrors the ritualistic moves of the country dance of the book's title. The form of the narrative reveals further dualities: the novel is split between Ann's supposed diary and the Introduction and Conclusion provided by Evans; it is a work of fiction, which claims to have a factual base. In a further dichotomy, the text attributed to Margiad Evans is interspersed with illustrations by Peggy Whistler, Evans's given name.

In this chapter, I will analyse how Evans begins to articulate her own search for identity through the conflicted character of Ann. Identity is negotiated through place and through acts of writing. The geographical borderland becomes a site for the

[1] Margiad Evans, *Country Dance* (London: Arthur Barker, 1932; repr. London: John Calder, 1978), p.vii. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

psychological negotiation of identity. In addition, both Ann and her creator are writers; they both produce a book. Ann's book, her diary, asserts her identity and, crucially, survives the destruction of her corporeal body. Evans's book, *Country Dance*, began to establish her identity as a writer and survives in a recently published new edition (Parthian, 2006).

The search for identity

The question of the locus of the writer's identity is presented to the reader on the title page of *Country Dance*; it reads: *Country Dance* by Margiad Evans; Illustrations by Peggy Whistler. As we know, Evans and Whistler are one and the same person, but Evans delighted in the fact that some of her readers would not know that she had provided the illustrations for her own text[2]. When Whistler, already a professional illustrator, chose to publish her first novel under the name of Margiad Evans, she chose a name that would stand for her writerly self for the rest of her life. It is impossible to know whether the initials it provided, 'ME', are a conscious or unconscious pointer to her conviction, expressed many times in her journals and autobiographical writing, that the writer was the real, essential part of herself. Margiad is the Welsh form of Peggy; Evans was the name of her paternal grandmother. Ann Evans was the daughter of a Lancashire clergyman, but was thought to have been of Welsh extraction. Evans gives the name Ann to her heroine, who, if she had married her Welsh lover, would have become Ann Evans. It seems that part of the author's project was imaginatively to invent her own antecedents.

Evans's choice of names both for herself and her characters suggests a complicated relationship between author and text. Her adopted Christian name, Margiad, is given to one of the characters in *Country Dance*. It may be a reflection of

[2] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 23366D, p.142/5.

her own personal life at the time that the lot of her fictional namesake is not a happy one. In the novel Margiad Powys has admired Gabriel Ford, one of Ann's suitors, from afar, and for years has hated Ann for his sake (p.62). After Gabriel's betrothal to Ann is broken, he 'takes up' with Margiad, but she holds no serious attraction for him and later, renewing his proposal to Ann, he tells her, 'Margiad means nought to me' (p.69). Later we are told that poor Margiad is to be seen, '...looking as miserable as a moulting hen' (p.71). Here, Evans inflicts on her fictional namesake an intensely painful experience with which she herself was familiar. As an adolescent she had conceived a hopeless and completely unreciprocated passion for the family doctor, thirty years her senior. Her second novel has this as its central theme. In *Country Dance* Evans's heroine, Ann, seems to have no sympathy for Margiad's plight. Her sadness makes her unattractive, a comic and pathetic image, and her evident misery is dismissed. By treating her namesake like this Evans demonstrates her awareness of how the world might view her own misplaced passion. This is an example of what Suzanne Nalbantian calls a 'proliferation of the self into selves through characterisation'[3], and is a key aspect of Evans's literary practice.

Within the journals too, names are a clue to the different identities Evans appears to assume. She refers to herself variously as Peggy, Margiad, and, significantly, Arabella, the name she will give to her 'fictitious' heroine in *The Wooden Doctor'*. The 'I' of the journals is a multi-faceted and shifting construct which relates to the characters she creates for her fiction, just as they partake of their creator. In her private journals Evans anticipates the position adopted by Roland Barthes in his own autobiography, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977). Here he discards the first person singular in favour of 'he', 'R.B.', 'you' and 'I', which he employs arbitrarily

[3] Nalbantian, p.57.

throughout in order to demonstrate his conviction that the subject of his autobiography is an illusion, an ideological construct[4].

In *Country Dance,* Ann's identity is explored in the context of her perception of where she belongs: this involves a consideration of place, as determining identity, and nationality as connected with language. Ann's relationships with her parents, with the two men who profess to love her and with Olwen, her friend, all contribute to our sense of who she is. Evans's implication of herself in the text through her use of names, her choice of setting and her comments on the action in the Introduction and Conclusion, suggests that she is using her text to address personal questions about the location of identity.

The Welsh border country was an area which had huge significance for Evans. Aged nine, she and her sister Nancy were sent to stay with an aunt and uncle who lived on a farm, Benhall, near Ross-on-Wye. A year later, Peggy and Nancy joined their parents, elder sister and younger brother who had settled in nearby Lavender Cottage at Bridstow. The area became central to Evans's emotional and imaginative life. Her four novels are all set in or around Ross, which she names Salus, and its significance as a healing place for her troubled mind when she became mortally ill is documented in her unpublished memoir of childhood, *The Immortal Hospital.*

Evans invested the border with huge symbolic significance; it was important to *Country Dance* from conception through composition. Evans conceived the idea while staying with her cousin near Monmouth; the greater part was written at home on the border in Lavender Cottage, but to finish it she felt the need to cross into Wales, and to this end she spent the summer of 1930 in North Wales at Coch-y-Bûg, a farm near Pontllyfni in Caernarvonshire. In *Country Dance*, the border dominates the action both literally and metaphorically. Evans foregrounds the importance of Ann's heritage and

[4] Barthes, Roland, *Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1977).

the significance of the novel's setting in her Introduction: 'Born of an English father and Welsh mother, brought up on a farm in the mountains, she returned for a brief period to her border birthplace' (p.vii). Ann has mixed blood and, according to Evans, it is her inability to reconcile the two warring nations she represents that brings her to tragedy.

Evans herself, through the adoption of a Welsh nom de plume, lays claim to a similar dual nationality. In a letter of January 1946 she speaks of being glad of her 'drop of Welsh blood'[5], while later the same year, in another letter, she declares, 'I'm not Welsh: I never posed as Welsh....I am the border – a very different thing. The English side of the border too'[6]. These letters, written sixteen years after *Country Dance,* show that she continued to link her search for personal identity to a sense of national belonging. In this context it is significant that her heroine in this first novel has mixed blood: her mother is Welsh and her father English.

Evans, perhaps influenced by the time she spent in Pontllyfni, associates national identity with language. Pontllyfni is situated in a remote area of the North Welsh coast, which was at the time, and still is, a stronghold of the Welsh language; she would have heard little English spoken. The first language of the Lloyd Jones family who farmed Coch-y-Bûg was Welsh and Ifor Williams, Professor of Welsh at University College, Bangor and his wife, with whom she socialised, were also Welsh speakers. This exposure to the Welsh language from educated people who were themselves bilingual had a profound effect on Evans. Not only did she give Ann's mother the name of Professor Williams' wife, Myfanwy, but she also makes her a Welsh speaker, putting Welsh words and phrases into her mouth.

[5] Margiad Evans, NLW, File 7: Gwyn Jones Letters, Letter No 15 Potacre, January 28th 1946.
[6] NLW, File 7: Gwyn Jones Letters, Letter No 16, Potacre, March 6th 1946.

Areas where a population continues to use the indigenous language, despite it being superseded as the language of government, are frequently hotbeds of nationalism and it seems likely that Evans encountered Welsh national feeling during her stay at Pontllyfni. If so, as well as being made aware of the historical and cultural aspects of the language – Professor Williams was an expert in Old and Middle Welsh – it seems likely she would also have absorbed some sense of the political implications of its usage. To the Welsh the English language was a tool of conquest and a symbol of their subjugation. Ann's experience provides a microcosm of this situation: English is the language of the men who seek to dominate and control her – her father, Gabriel Ford and, initially, Evan ap Evans. If the various movements back and forth across the border made by the characters mirror the country dance of the title, then language provides the musical impetus and accompaniment for these movements.

Evans sets up her exploration of the link between national and personal identity by locating her main characters on the opposite side of the border from the one where they were born. Ann's Welsh mother crossed the border as a bride with her English husband, John, who works for a sheep farmer, Evan ap Evans, another Welsh exile. At the start of her story Ann has been living with an English cousin on a farm in the Welsh mountains for fifteen years and Gabriel, her lover, who works at Tan y Bryn, is also English. For all these characters, language is key to their perception of their identities.

In the opening movement of the dance, Ann crosses the border to 'look to her mother' (p.3). Evans implicates her own mother in the text by dedicating the novel to her; her fictional heroine would never have started to write her book had she not been obliged to leave Gabriel behind in Wales to come home and look after her mother. Gabriel gives her the diary to record the events of her life while they are apart. Ann's mother is, therefore, the raison d'être of Ann's story; without her there would have been no book.

The central importance of the mother in the development of all aspects of identity is a common place of psychoanalytic theory. In his *Introductory Lectures* Freud says:

> I can give you no idea of the important bearing of this first object [the mother] upon the choice of every later object, of the profound effects it has, in its transformations and substitutions, in even the remotest regions of our sexual lives[7].

For Freud, the individual's negotiation of the Oedipus complex at age three or four lays down the basis for his/her gender identity and how it is lived. He suggests that all children have a passionate attachment to the mother and a desire to kill the father. How each individual deals with this is the pivotal marker of gender difference.

The object relations theorists, Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott, focus on the much younger child arguing that the child's relationship with the mother in the first six months of life is central to all future development. Winnicott talks about the necessity of the mother to be 'good enough'[8], by which he means capable of facilitating and providing a strong enough 'holding environment', which allows the child both to reach out to the external world and to be happily alone. According to Nancy Chodorow, the American feminist sociologist, 'The character of the infant's early relation to its mother profoundly affects its sense of self, its later object-relationships, and its feelings about its mother and about women in general'[9].

Mothers, and the troubled relationships they have with their offspring, feature in all Evans's novels and it is clear from a reading of Evans's journals that her relationship with her own mother was a turbulent one. In *Country Dance,* dissonance occurs because

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[7] Sigmund Freud, translated from the German by James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* henceforth *SE* (First pub. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1963; repr. 1991), *SE* XVI: *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916-7), p.314.

[8] Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (First pub. 1971; repr. London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.13.

[9] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 1978 repr. 1999), p.77.

mother and daughter have been living on different sides of the border for fifteen years. No explanation is given for Ann's dismissal from home, but it surely contributes to the feeling of estrangement between them. Another factor is hinted at earlier in Ann's diary. Reminiscing about the time before Ann went away to live in Wales, her mother remarks, 'My son was alive then' (p.5). And Ann writes, 'I often think of Rhys, who died grown up and married when I was no more than fifteen; my mother loved him heart and soul, for it seemed he was all her child' (p.5).

The implication of these ambiguous words is that no daughter could make up for this terrible loss. He was 'all her child'; completely hers, the only child she wanted. This also explains the coolness and distance when Ann writes about her mother in her diary. Both Ann's separation from her mother at an early age and her mother's preference for her son explain why, in psychoanalytic terms, Ann might feel inadequately mothered[10].

The relationship between Ann and her dying mother is inflected through language and notions of national identity. Although Ann has been living in Wales for most of her life, she reacts angrily when addressed in Welsh by her father's employer, Evan ap Evans, '"I am English. I was with English folk in Wales, and I hate the Welsh and all their shifty ways of dealing. 'Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief'"' (p.24). Yet her mother is Welsh; Myfanwy, brought across the border as a bride, has endured thirty years exiled from both her native land and her native language. It is only when she is dying that she reverts to her mother tongue, the first time she has spoken Welsh since her wedding day. At this point, in extremis, her husband, John, calls upon his daughter to help him to communicate with his dying wife in her own language, 'Myfanwy, Myfanwy, I am here. Speak to her, Ann! Can't you? Speak her own

[10] Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (First pub. 1975; repr. London: Virago, 1988), p.180.

tongue!' (p.36). Finally, coached by Ann, John recites a Welsh phrase meaning 'I am here beside thee', and his wife smiles. But there is nothing to be done and she dies of Angina Pectoris, her heart. Significantly, according to the doctor, it was waving to Ann as she crossed the field to take food to her father that caused the fatal attack. This small separation, symbolic of their greater one, has proved fatal to the mother and will indirectly lead to her daughter's death also.

Ann's parents have failed to find a language for their union which does not disadvantage one of them and this contributes to the impression that their marriage has lacked true harmony. Ann's mother dies, heart-broken, recalling the lines from an old Welsh song printed on the novel's title page in both Welsh and English:

> Place thy hand, unless thou believest me,
> Under my breast and beware of hurting me;
> Thou shalt hear if thou listen
> The sound of the little heart breaking.

After his wife's death, John declares that he will fulfil her last wish to be buried in Wales, but after the funeral he asserts that he has no intention of tending his wife's grave: 'Once I am out of Wales I stay out of Wales' (p.41). The division and animosity between Welsh and English is starkly drawn.

Ann's relationship with her father is also troubled. The words he addresses to her in English, her stated language of preference, are unrelievedly harsh and unfeeling: 'It is a little hard that he should never open his mouth but to grumble and find fault with all I do' (p.10). The evening of her mother's death her father tells her she must go back to Wales and stay there:

> See here, now your mother is dead I have no use for you; all you could do for me I could do a deal better for myself...don't you set foot over the Border without I sends for you. You will not be welcome (p. 40).

His rejection of her following so closely the death of her mother seems particularly heartless. Later in the novel she is called home, back to Salus, to help with the scabrous sheep when her father's drinking has rendered him incapable of saving them himself. Even under these circumstances his attitude does not soften:

> Today I let my father know I am not going back to Twelve Poplars [her home in Wales] before the Spring. "Do as you please," he answers. It is hard that whatever I do should be of so little account (p.92).

In her portrayal of Ann's troubled relationship with her parents, in which she feels of 'little account,' Evans is projecting elements of her own experience on to her heroine. Her father, Godfrey Whistler, was an alcoholic, who died of liver failure in December 1935[11]. He was suffering from the effects of alcoholism when his daughter was writing her first novel. In her second, *The Wooden Doctor,* Evans offers as fiction an account of her experience of growing up with such a father, details of which can be verified in her journals as based on personal experience (Nov.- Dec. 1935)[12].

> In our home there was no peace. My father did more than drink occasionally; he was an habitual and incurable drunkard. No word was ever more accurately or deservedly applied; no family was ever rendered more miserable by its justice[13].

As a result of his drinking, responsibility for the management of the household devolved on to Evans, her two sisters and her mother. They had to take over the traditional male role, and perhaps Evans, in her portrait of Ann, reflects her feeling that, despite her best efforts, she was of little account. It is interesting also to note that Evans, like Ann, had a brother. Roger, the only boy and the baby of the family, born in 1916. It seems likely that Mrs Whistler loved her youngest child and only son 'heart and soul', leaving her daughters feeling second best. This suggestion is reinforced by

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[11] Margiad Evans, *'Arabella's Voice'*, NLW, MS 23577C p.31.
[12] NLW, MS 23577C p. 27; pp.30-3.
[13] Margiad Evans, *The Wooden Doctor* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1933; repr. Dinas Powys: Honno, 2005), p.10.

the fact that in her third novel, *Turf or Stone,* Evans portrays another mother who dotes on her young son in preference to his older sisters.

Ann's uneasy relationship with her Anglo-Welsh parents, reinforced by issues of nationality and language, is mirrored in her encounters with her suitors, one English and one Welsh. Evan ap Evans, a Welshman, bilingual like Ann and her mother, has settled on the English side of the border and is Ann's father's master. Early on in her diary Ann records that she hears him whisper, 'There is a longing in me for my own country' (p.25). Gabriel Ford, an Englishman, has worked at Tan y Bryn, a farm in Wales, for fifteen years. He speaks only English and Ann records in her diary that he has 'no use for the Welsh' (p.43).

Both men have a strong sense of identity linked to their birthplace. For Gabriel, this is accompanied by a deep antagonism directed to those who originate from across the border. Ann records in her diary an incident at the sheep dog trials where Gabriel asserts that he will regain the cup from 'the Caernarvonshire bitch' with Ben, the only English sheep dog at the trials (p. 65). The competition is fierce and nationalistic and culminates in a fistfight between Gabriel and Evan. Gabriel is beaten and Evan signals his victory with the cry, 'Cymru am byth!'[14] (p.67). The conflict between these two men represents the conflict between their nations.

Nationalistic feeling also runs high at a supper party held by Gwen Powys, Gabriel's employer, to which Ann, and her English cousin, Mary, are invited. Also present at the supper are some of Gwen's Welsh friends and Gabriel, her English shepherd. The wine flows and antagonism surfaces and quickly escalates with opposing cries of:

> "I drink to Wales!"
> Gabriel roars:

[14] 'Wales for ever!'

"And I to England!" (p.61)

Gwen is able to calm things by saying quietly, "'I give the Border"' (p 61).

There is the implication that the border may be a place where harmony can be restored as it represents a place of equilibrium, neutrality, where neither side has the upper hand. However, borders are traditionally places of conflict as each side, constrained and goaded by the limits imposed by the border, strives for supremacy.

Ann, with her mixed blood, is the living representative of the border and her story demonstrates that this blood cannot mingle harmoniously, but provokes a struggle so fierce that she cannot survive. This is Evans's interpretation and, should the reader be in any doubt, she uses her Conclusion to Ann's supposed diary to emphasize the point: 'Here is represented the entire history of the Border, just as the living Ann must have represented it herself – that history which belongs to all border lands and tells of incessant warfare' (p.95).

Ann's emotional movement away from her English lover and towards Evan ap Evans, the Welshman, is reflected by her changing response to the language they speak. Ann's first encounter with Evan occurs when he is angry with her for letting the chimney catch fire. He chooses the language of power rather than his mother tongue to chastise her, and his words make her hate him, but beneath them she hears his Welsh tonality and notes in her diary, 'He has a Welsh voice that sings in speaking English' (p.6). Some weeks later, at a dance, Ann hears Evan singing, 'He sings softly, in the voice that the English have not, an old Welsh song that I have sung round the fire at night' (p.14). Again the soft, melodic quality of his voice, whether speaking English or Welsh, resonates with Ann. Welsh, her mother's language is, for her, the language of tradition and nostalgia, of home and hearth and her response to it is visceral. Even the language of power is mitigated and replaced by something softer and deeply appealing.

The days pass, and often when Evan sees Ann in the garden he addresses her in Welsh. This disturbs her at first and when she challenges him, he has to remind her of her mixed blood,

> "Why do you speak Welsh to me?"
> "Because I am a Welshman."
> "But I am English."
> "Half. No, not even that, for you have lived in the mountains" (p.14).

But there is a sense of her being irresistibly drawn to this man who shares her language, who speaks to her in what is literally her mother tongue. In her final diary entries, after she has rejected Gabriel in Evan's favour, she records happily conversing with him in Welsh and declaring, also in Welsh, that Evan ap Evans has no equal in England (p.90).

For Evan ap Evans, choosing to speak to her in Welsh is a means of establishing an intimacy with Ann, while at the same time excluding and marginalizing her English lover, Gabriel. In her diary, she reflects on Gabriel's antipathy towards the Welsh and how this hatred focuses on their language:

> He will never go where the Welsh tongue is spoken, so be that he can help it; he finds it bitter to work at Tan y Bryn, although it is a good place with a kind master. He was born and bred in England, and he has no use for the Welsh or their way of speaking (p.43).

When Gabriel comes over the border to visit Ann, he has only just arrived when Evan passes and calls to Ann in Welsh. Gabriel is instantly suspicious, '"Who is that calling you dear names in Welsh, so friendly?"' (p.17). After reading Ann's diary and finding reference to Evan, Gabriel refers to Welsh as Evan's 'dirty tongue' and addresses Ann as 'you little bitch' (p.18). Welsh, to Gabriel, is a 'dirty' language because, despite it being the language of the minority, it is nevertheless a symbol of their resistance to the conquering power; in its usage is their refusal to submit; it, therefore, paradoxically renders him powerless and marginalised. He cannot understand, Ann records, why folk in Wales should prefer their own tongue to English (p.60). His is

the arrogance of the oppressor failing to understand the cultural heritage of the oppressed and this racial stance is mirrored in his relationship with Ann. His attitude to her is one of overbearing jealousy and suspicion, accompanied by the desire for control and this, together with the violence of his disposition, kills their relationship.

Ann finally rejects him after he has fought with Evan over her. Significantly, she rejects him in terms of his nationality, '"If you are an Englishman, Gabriel Ford, then from this day I'll count myself as Welsh. You are a jealous, unreasonable man, and I pity the woman your choice falls on!"' (p.69). In rejecting Gabriel, Ann is refusing to replicate the pattern of her parents' marriage. If Ann had become Gabriel's wife, she would, like her mother, have been forced to abandon the Welsh language, speaking only English to her husband. However, Evan too is bilingual so their marriage would be linguistically equal and, the implication is, the more harmonious for that.

Evan secures Ann's love by appealing, through language, to her Welsh blood inherited from her mother. Her choice of him marks a victory for the Welsh female side of her nature. But Ann never marries her Welshman. Her body is found in the river, murdered by her jealous English lover. If Ann's book, as Evans claims in her Introduction, has as its unconscious theme, 'the struggle for supremacy in her mixed blood,' then her violent death at English hands is open to a political interpretation. Ann, by choosing her Welsh lover, is allowing the supremacy of her Welsh heritage and the only recourse of England's representative is violence and murder. In a double blow for the Welsh, Evans is suspected of her murder. He feels compelled to leave the country and ends his days in Canada, an exile.

Ann's liminal position in relation to both her parents and her lovers is represented by the geographical border which divides the opposing sides of her inheritance. Her failure to resolve this position successfully proves fatal. It is an irony that when first afflicted by the seizures which would eventually be diagnosed as

evidence of terminal illness, Evans speculates that her disease might have been caused by her failure to resolve what she perceives as two warring sides of her own nature: the artist and writer as opposed to the housewife and mother[15].

The book: writers, readers and texts

Both Ann and her creator suffer crises of identity and both, in searching for resolution, produce a text: Evans's text *Country Dance* contains Ann's text, her diary. *Country Dance* is presented as having two authors: Evans and Ann. There are also many readers: Gabriel, Ann's lover who reads her diary; Evans, who finds, reads and transcribes it; and ourselves, the readers of *Country Dance.* This proliferation of writers and readers allows Evans to begin to explore the complex interplay between writers, readers and texts. By suggesting that the novel is based on fact, Evans enters into a relationship with her readers whereby we either believe that we are being offered factual truth or we collude with the writer to believe the artistic truth of her fiction.

In *The Wooden Doctor*, Evans describes a meeting between Arabella, her fictional counterpart, and her publisher to discuss the novel she has just completed. He is confused by it and asks her if she is trying to cheat him: was it her intention to convey the impression that she had found the diary manuscript in a cottage – was it genuine? Her response, 'For my life I could not answer'[16], suggests that fact and fiction are inextricably intertwined within Arabella's consciousness. Her powerful expression, 'for my life' is ambiguous: if her life depended on it she could not answer, an extreme position in itself, but also *in* her own life she cannot answer for what is fact and what fiction. In giving these words to her alter ego, Arabella, Evans is acknowledging that,

[15] Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness* (London: Arthur Barker, 1952; reprinted London: John Calder, 1978), p.177.
[16] Margiad Evans, *The Wooden Doctor,* pp.132-3.

on some level, she was aware that she and her 'fictional' creations share some truth: that they are, in fact, projections.

One of the ways Evans's introduction attempts to authenticate both Ann and her book is by giving a very detailed description of the cottage where Ann was born. She locates it precisely, but substitutes the fictional place name Salus for Ross-on-Wye, her own home town. She brings the cottage vividly into the present, assuring her reader that she is familiar with the place because she knows that the current owner uses the place for storing apples (p.viii). Evans also comments on the style of the diary, in particular Ann's use of the present tense. She explains this by the fact that it was originally intended to take the place of speech between her and her sweetheart and opines that it gives 'additional strength and vitality' (p.ix) to Ann's writing. It has the allied effect of making the material stay present and 'alive'; it cannot be consigned to the past, like 'dead' history.

Evans, like her character, was also a diarist and in her own diaries often employs the present. In February 1933, for example, 'I suck oranges, smoke, sit before a hot cinder fire or wander about the room touching books quite alone – Nancy is in bed asleep' (Feb. 16th 1933)[17]. Evans remarks of Ann's journal that the use of the present tense 'gives the uncomfortable feeling of listening at a keyhole' (p.ix), the reader feels like the voyeur Gabriel aspires to be, and, from the above extract, one can see how apt a description this is for a reader of Evans's own diary. The use of the present tense draws the reader in to share the experience described.

Despite that, it might still seem more natural for a diarist to write, 'Another person came today' rather than, as appears, 'Another person comes today' (p.5). However, Evans's biographer Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan makes the point that the technique of narrating in the present tense can be traced back to oral story telling

[17] NLW, MS 23366D, p.138/2.

traditions, especially among women. She speculates that Evans may have heard Mrs Lloyd Jones using it at Coch-y-Bûg, where Evans stayed as a paying guest while she was finishing writing *Country Dance*[18]. The use of the present tense for narrative is particularly common in Welsh and Evans, in choosing it for Ann's journal, emphasizes her linguistic inheritance.

The first part of Ann's Book, dated 1850, opens with the words:

> Gabriel gives me this book, telling me to write in it all I do, for him to see, until we shall be married. And when that will be I do not know for I am to leave Twelve Poplars and look to my mother (p.3).

Ann starts her narrative by describing her lover who is both possessive and controlling. Gabriel hopes Ann's diary will allow him to spy on her – the implication that he does not trust her seems unavoidable. Ann, however, cannot foresee a marriage in the near future because there is a more important relationship to which she must attend: she must look to her mother. The fact that Ann records this obligation in the first sentences of her diary shows the centrality of this relationship in her consciousness and her awareness of how other relationships might be contingent upon it.

There is some evidence in the opening pages that Ann is aware of Gabriel as her reader. She records his imagined reaction to events and her longing for his presence. After she has helped to deal with a chimney fire and ministered efficiently to Tom Summers, who has cut his leg badly with a scythe, she adds, with perhaps unconscious coquetry, 'Gabriel should be content to have a wife who can clean chimneys and stop bleeding' (p.16).

On the two occasions when Ann records a desire for her lover's presence it is in response to an encounter with her father's master Evan ap Evans, whom she repeatedly claims to hate (pp.6 and 12). Ann describes in her diary an incident at a dance when

[18] Lloyd-Morgan, p.30.

Evans calls her 'sweetheart' and forces her to dance with him: '...the master slips up behind me, claps his arm round my waist like a vice...I am compelled, though I am not at all content...If I could free my hands, I would box my master's ears for all the world' (pp.14-15). Ann is apparently confident that her boldness in answering her master, the violence of her reaction to his touch, her assertion that she hates Evans and wishes for Gabriel, will be enough to reassure him as he reads. The subtle psychological truth of Evans's writing is apparent here: in her diary Ann reveals more to the reader than she realises. Her wish for her lover is a way of evading the challenge posed by someone new, who is threatening to the status quo and dangerous to her peace of mind.

When Gabriel is due to visit her and read her diary she takes care that the book will look especially attractive to him by giving it a new calico cover (p.16). She refers to the diary as 'our' book; something to share that will bring them together after their time apart. As she awaits his arrival, she goes to gather watercress in the brook and, looking down, sees her reflection staring back, 'out of the brown water among the reeds, almost like a person drowned' (p.17). The reader, if not Ann, is discomfited. The water transforms and distorts her appearance, just as the Ann of her diary will be transformed by Gabriel's reading. The scene also anticipates her fate. In the Conclusion Evans tells of the discovery of Ann's body in a deep pool, 'wrapped in water weeds' (p.94).

Gabriel and Ann's reunion is interrupted by Evans calling out a Welsh greeting to her as he rides by (p.17). Gabriel is immediately alerted and wants to 'show him' (p.17). Nevertheless, they take the little book with them to the spinney; Gabriel is amused by its new cover, but his unnecessarily offensive comment, 'I hope the inside is as clean' (p.17), with its sexual overtones indicates that his jealous nature has been aroused.

Ann records that she sees Gabriel's face grow dark as he reads and when he flings the book away into the nettles and brambles it is with the words, 'I know Welsh

... I understand why you looked on the ground when that man passed you, speaking his dirty tongue. Get away, you little bitch, and find your Welshman!' (p.18).

The fact that Gabriel's jealous rage and humiliation seem to be exacerbated because his perceived rival is Welsh brings to the fore the racial hostility and animosity which pervade the novel. When told of Gabriel's departure, Ann's mother indicates that, for her, his nationality means that he is not the ideal suitor for her daughter, despite or perhaps because of the fact that she herself married an Englishman. 'He is a fine man...but I wish, Ann, you would not marry an Englishman' (p.18).

Gabriel misinterprets Ann's text. In initiating the diary, he has sought to police Ann's actions by instigating a form of voluntary self-surveillance. However, control over the content of her diary, what she chooses to include or omit from her record of her daily life, necessarily rests with Ann, but she is unable to control her reader's interpretation of her text. Gabriel fills in the gaps in her narrative and assumes that Evan is her lover. After a violent struggle, Ann retrieves her book. She brings it home and writes, 'It is mine now. Farewell Gabriel' (p.18). The book is no longer being written for Gabriel, but for herself and, unwittingly, for posterity.

It is a paradox that in her novel, Evans shows the inability of a writer, Ann, to control her reader's response to her text, yet she herself tries, in very overt ways, to control the reader's response to *Country Dance* through the Introduction and Conclusion she provides to the found diary and through her illustrations. In the Introduction, Evans explains how the diary came to be written in the beginning as a 'concession' to Ann's sweetheart's 'jealous disposition' (p.vii), but once the habit was formed she continued to write, '...to that and my discovery of her book I owe my true knowledge of a tragedy which, tricked out and distorted by tradition, has been handed down among us' (p.vii).

Evans tells the reader that Ann's memory is 'curiously nebulous and unreal' (p.vii), whereas the memory of the two men involved in her story, Evan ap Evans and Gabriel Ford, has been 'ironically accentuated' (p.vii). In that patriarchal and remote society, where stories were passed down from generation to generation through the oral tradition, Ann's role in events has been diminished to that of 'a mere motive' (p.vii) for a tragedy which engulfed two hitherto worthy and respected men as well as herself. Seventy years after the imagined event, when Evans is supposedly writing, she says that many can describe the men but only one man remembers Ann's face 'because as a boy he loved it' (p.viii). So what little place she had in the public imagination relied, up to the finding of her book, on a man's regard. But with the discovery of her diary, Evans implies, 'Ann' will be able to have a voice, rescue herself post mortem from obscurity and write herself into the centre of her story.

By the time she came to write her first novel, Evans was already a prolific writer of journals, many of which now form the Margiad Evans archive housed in the National Library of Wales. Unfortunately, those journals covering the period in 1930-32, when she was writing *Country Dance,* have been lost. It seems likely that they were among the ones she refers to in her journal of June 11th 1933.

> Before coming to bed I burned my old letters and diaries having sorted them, torn them up and poured a can of petrol over them, they flamed and black scraps lighted of their burden of words, floated over the hedge[19].

The choice of 'burden' to describe the burning words suggests both that something significant was lost and a sense of relief that by burning the words, she has excised parts of her past. However, as Freud suggests, the past cannot be left behind so easily. I suggest that *Country Dance,* written during this period and constructed around a found diary, fills the silence left by the destroyed journals.

[19] NLW, MS 23366D, p.192/64.

Certainly by presenting her first work of fiction as a diary, which ensures the centrality of the female protagonist, Evans conveys her sense of the importance of women writing their lives in order to have a voice. In her journal entry for May 14th 1934 she says:

> If I could have the patience and persistence to grapple with my problems here on paper, to set down every important incident, then the reader if he survive the writer and this book ever falls into his hands, might understand what winds fill my sails and why I trim them[20].

In this extract one can see that even when writing in what she calls her 'secret' book she has an awareness that it, like the fictitious Ann's diary, might one day fall into the hands of a reader who might from it be able to derive her secrets, and understand what desires and motivations drive her and why she chooses to contain them. Paradoxically, in her private writing she is aware of a potential reader.

Evans further emphasises the crucial role of Ann's diary in her Conclusion which opens with a description of the discovery of Ann's body, causing suspicion to fall on both Gabriel and Evan. Gabriel, we are told, disappeared from the area, never to be seen again and Evans emigrated to Canada, driven away by the dislike of his neighbours and his grief over the death of his intended wife. Evans points to Ann's book as the repository of 'fact': 'Gabriel is branded...a darker pen runs beside Ann's quill, tracing a noose which, had it lain to hand, would have hanged him (p.95). She then makes a telling distinction:

> In this book some may see only the evidence of a guilt which never came to light until its power was as dead as the hand that wrote it, or at most, the insignificant prelude to a commonplace disaster. Also there may be those who will discern the *subtler underlying narrative* that bound the days together, *the record of a mind rather than actions,* a mind which though clear in itself was never conscious of the two nations at war within it (p.95, my italics).

[20] NLW, MS 23366D, p.181/54.

This echoes the opening line of the Introduction: 'The struggle for supremacy in her mixed blood is the *unconscious* theme of Ann's book' (p.vii, my italics).

The references to the 'unconscious' and the 'underlying narrative' of a 'mind rather than actions' illustrates Evans's awareness of the possibility of the writer's subject being something of which the writer herself is unconscious, something which the reader must supply. She also demonstrates her preference for what Virginia Woolf, in her essay 'Phases of Fiction', recommends as one of the priorities for the modern novel to '...illumine the mind within rather than the world without'[21].

In the closing paragraphs of the Conclusion the writer emphasizes the importance of Ann's narrative:

> ...the story begins and ends with the book...Complete and triumphant, it stands untouched by word of mouth fed from the rusty memories of folk long since dead who would have decked it out according to their own opinions and allotted tails and haloes as their lively fancy pleased (p.95).

Ann's book is 'complete and triumphant'; her words render the truth of her story and this truth cannot then be altered or obscured. However, this statement is undermined by what has already been observed: Ann and Gabriel's relationship foundered after he mis-read her journal, finding what he was looking for in his obsessive jealousy, rather than what she intended. Evans was well aware of the elusive nature of language: one of her preoccupations as a writer was the difficulty of finding a way to express the truth of what she felt[22]. In *Country Dance*, Evans demonstrates how Ann's words survive her death and present a version of her story. This was to be Evans's life's work: to leave words behind to speak for her, after her death, even if as readers we all find different versions of her story.

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[21] Virginia Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction' (1929), in *Collected Essays II* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p.81.
[22] See Chapter 5.

As well as directing her readers' responses through her Introduction and Conclusion, Evans, using her given name Peggy Whistler, makes a further attempt to manipulate the reception of her novel through her illustrations in the text[23]. Each one of the four illustrations is accompanied by a line from the text, and consists of a group of characters set against a flat background of pure colour. In a novel which continually insists on a particular geographical setting, it is an irony that, in her illustrations, Evans provides no background in which to contextualise her characters. The illustrations constitute a simplification of a text which is multi-layered and complex. The lack of background detail focuses the attention on the actions of the figures and the patterns they make on the page. They seem to dance around one another rather than with each other and when they do touch it is more often in anger than in love or friendship. Isolation and separation are key motifs.

Two of the plates illustrate moments of confrontation in the novel: when Evan seizes Ann by the shoulders when she has set the chimney on fire, and when he argues with the gypsies (Figs. 2 and 4). In both of these a sense of opposition and hostility is vividly conveyed. The other two plates arguably represent more harmonious moments: when Ann gives the children bread and treacle (Fig.3); and when Margiad and Gabriel walk together (Fig. 1). It is not surprising that three out of the four illustrations feature Ann; what is remarkable is the fact that the fourth, which appears on the cover and as the frontispiece of the 1978 John Calder paperback edition and on the cover of the edition published in 2006 in the Library of Wales Series, is the one featuring Margiad and Gabriel (Fig.1).

Evans's possible motivation for naming this unhappy character after herself has been discussed above. The illustration has the caption, 'They walked up and down' and refers to an entry in Ann's diary, 'Gabriel has taken up with Margiad: three times they

[23] See Appendix.

walk slowly up and down beneath the poplars. For years she has hated me for his sake' (p. 62). The quotation makes clear that Margiad has had unrequited feelings for Gabriel for some time, only to be taken up briefly by him before he drops her to continue to press his suit to Ann.

The illustration of Gabriel and Margiad is full of tension: they link arms but their figures bend away from each other and they gaze, not at each other, but outwards towards the children on the edges of the picture. Both Gabriel and Margiad seem to be inviting the children to join them, trying to draw them in towards them, but the children resist. One child backs away from Gabriel's outstretched hand and another gazes at Margiad as she inclines her arm towards him with a look which conveys surprise, even disapproval. He makes no move in her direction, instead he firmly holds on to a smaller child with both hands. They seem about to move further away, out of the picture. The refusal of the children to make a happy circle with the couple, despite their best efforts, suggests that there will be no fruitful union for Gabriel and Margiad.

The pattern made by the figures on the page, especially the way the central couple link arms, apparently moving in synchronisation with each other and trying to involve others in their movements, is suggestive of a dance rather than a walk. This impression is reinforced by the description in the text which has a curiously formal quality: Ann records that they walked slowly three times up and down. Just as in a country dance, where participants come together only for a short time before moving on to a different partner, so Gabriel and Margiad are together only fleetingly before the dance moves on. Their lack of viability as a couple is subtly conveyed by their inability to persuade others to join them in their dance.

The figures in all the illustrations embody a paradox: their bodies are, for the most part, agents of dynamic action while their faces are blank and featureless revealing little individuality, no emotion, no inner life. The 'dances' they are performing seem

more akin to rituals containing, rather than expressing emotion. In this sense they echo the writing. Ann records even traumatic events in her diary in stark, practical terms often devoid of analysis or reflection. 'My mother is dead' (p.35), she writes before relating the circumstances. She does not reveal her feelings about her bereavement; she just describes her actions.

By incorporating Peggy Whistler's illustrations into her text, Margiad Evans attempts to exert further control over how her novel is read. Both narrative and illustrations seem simple: the writing is spare and the illustrations are similarly plain and undecorated. Both pictures and text show characters in relation to one another, often in opposition. However, this is not the whole story: just as there are gaps in the text, so the faces of the characters illustrated are blank and featureless; the reader is left to fill in the gaps and details for herself.

Evans's reiterated authorial direction in her Introduction and Conclusion is that the subtext of Ann's diary concerns her fate as representative of the history of the border, which is a history of warfare. Ann is desired by both an Englishman and a Welshman. It is inevitable that an alliance with one will bring alienation and violence from the other. However, a parallel with the psychoanalytic process might be drawn here: just as the analysand may insist on repeating a version of her story to her analyst, in an unconscious attempt to obscure and disguise the real story which lies beneath, so Evans's persistent directions to her readers on how to read her text can be seen as her unconscious attempt to disguise the subtext of her work; in trying to control the reader's response to her story Evans paradoxically highlights the potential value of interrogating her text. In the next section of this chapter I will indicate what that subtext might be.

Gender and the Body

I have suggested that Ann is a projection of her creator in that both are writers. It is also clear that, through the character of Ann, Evans tentatively begins an exploration of sexuality and gender which continues in her other novels. A careful reading of *Country Dance* reveals that while men are responsible for the often-violent action of the novel, there are also several women who demonstrate a quiet strength.

Ann's world is one in which individuals pursue routine tasks, which are allocated according to traditional gender expectations: the men tend the animals; the women work in the dairy, sew, bake and look after the children. However, it is the women who, as landowners and farm managers, dominate the rural community in which Ann lives. Gwen Powys is Gabriel's employer at Tan y Bryn: it is her sheep he tends (p.43) and she who manages the farm with grim economy, stinting on food, candles and firewood (p.55). Ann lives at the neighbouring farm, Twelve Poplars, which is managed by her cousin Mary Maddocks. It is proof of Mary's standing in the area that her testimony alone saves Evan ap Evans from arrest after the discovery of Ann's body. Similarly, across the border in Salus, Evan's sister, Gwladys, is referred to as mistress of Cotterill's farm where Ann's father is employed as a shepherd.

Not only does Evans show women in powerful positions in the community, she also shows that women are perfectly capable of 'men's' work. After his wife's death, Ann's father, John, takes to drinking and this leads him to neglect his duties as a shepherd, allowing disease to enter the flock. Ann takes over his duties without hesitation, mixing up the ointment to treat the scabrous sheep and carrying it down to the pens in buckets and bowls. When she starts working alongside the men one of them

warns her '"Don't you touch them, 'tisn't work for a woman – you might catch it yourself" (p.84)[24].

Finding her father unconscious on the hillside from the effects of drink, she takes his place. Willy, his colleague, remonstrates with her again, telling her that it is not women's work, but she silences him by saying that she has done it before. No one argues until Evan, the master, appears and tells her to stop. She argues, but he has a solution: they will do the work together. The respect Evan shows for Ann's abilities has its roots earlier in the novel when Ann exhibits strong 'masculine' traits prompting him to treat her as an equal. For example, when Ann is roused to fury by his early attentions so much so that she wishes to do him physical harm, he seizes her hands and drags her into the dance. She records her feelings in her diary, 'If I could free my hands I would box my master's ears before all the world' (p.23). Later when she threatens to strike him, Evan recognises her strength and says to her, 'Wilt thou answer me straight like a man, since thou canst not speak to me like a woman?' (p.23). Evan and Ann establish a relationship based on equality: they have equal facility in language and they can work together with respect. As they come to realise this, they reach an understanding: they will marry (pp.92-3). It seems the sensible and inevitable option.

Despite Ann's decision to marry, the focus of interest in the novel remains with the women, another aspect of which is the relationship between Ann and Olwen, the Sexton's daughter. This is the only relationship in the novel where a feeling of genuine warmth is conveyed; Olwen's appearance is the only one Ann considers worthy of remark in her diary. Ann never mentions her lovers' appearance except when their faces betray anger, like Gabriel's 'black rage', nor does she speak of them with such

[24] In her recollections of childhood, *The Immortal Hospital* (1957), NLW MS 23369C, p.26, Evans describes how as a child staying on her Aunt and Uncle's farm she got on well with the sheep, helping her cousin, Robbie, to clean out their maggot wounds. She rounds them up, showing off to her father who does not know how to handle them.

tenderness and affection. But Ann describes Olwen as '...more lovely than anything I have ever set my eyes on' (p.87).

Her relationship with Olwen is intimate from the beginning. On p.7 Olwen is out in the rain looking for her father, the Sexton, whom she fears has fallen into the swollen river. Ann, having met her only once, takes her home: '"Come home and you shall sleep the night with me"...Olwen, tired out, goes off beside me the moment the candle is blown out' (pp.7-8). Their friendship blossoms and they become confidantes. Later, in an entry unique in the text for the sensuality of the language, Ann describes undressing Olwen:

> Olwen is sitting up with my mother. I find her asleep in the kitchen with her head on the table, and her long hair twining round the candlestick all among the grease. Such a beautiful face I have never seen. I carry her up, lay her on my bed and take off her clothes (p.15).

In contrast with her relationships with men there is a freedom and intimacy between Ann and Olwen. Most of the characters seem remote and disconnected from each other, but there is a real physical and emotional connection between these two women. They touch each other. Ann records, 'She takes my two hands and lays her cheek upon them' (p.22). And they repeatedly send messages of 'dear love' to each other when they are apart: '"If you should see Olwen Davies, give her my dear love"' (p.42). These are the most fulsome expressions of loving emotion in the novel.

Just as Ann crosses the border between England and Wales, and between the Welsh and English sides of her nature, so she traverses the boundary between roles and behaviours traditionally associated with the sexes. And it seems her emotions are engaged by Olwen's 'whimsical beauty' (p.vii) at least as much as they are by Gabriel or Evan.

From her journals it is clear that Evans herself inhabited a sexual border land where it was possible for her to form deep, intimate physical relationships with both men and women. The earliest account of an encounter with another woman, apart from the Ann/Olwen relationship in *Country Dance*, which is far from explicit, comes in unpublished fragments from the manuscript of her second novel, *The Wooden Doctor*. Here she describes a relationship which developed between Arabella, Evans's alter ego in the novel, and Mme Renée Maréchal, the mother of one of her pupils while she was teaching in Brittany. One evening Arabella goes to Mme Maréchal's room and invites her to accompany her to a ball. She persuades Renée to allow her to watch as she dresses. Again the description is notable for its sensuality:

> She bathed her face and shoulders and arms. The vertibrae [*sic*] protruded, the pale fine skin shone on each little knob with the soft lustre of a pearl. She combed her short fair hair into formal waves away from her face, and put on her black lace dress. Once she came over to me, stooped down and kissed me, whispering, "It is all for you that I do this" [25].

It is not known whether this incident is based on fact, but it seems very likely given the autobiographical nature of *The Wooden Doctor* and the period Evans is known to have spent in Brittany as a young woman[26].

Sensuously detailed observations of women proliferate throughout the writing, both in Evans's published work and in her journals. She sees with an artist's eye and, even years later when desperately ill, hospitalised and suffering from recurrent terrifying fits, she is able to describe Yolande, the daughter of Professor Golla, her doctor, who visits her in hospital. We read that she has black, pagan eyes, so alive they

[25] Margiad Evans, *The Wooden Doctor* Draft, NLW, MS 23357B p.136.
[26] Lloyd-Morgan, pp.12-14.

are hypnotic in their effect and her touch brings comfort[27]. Evans's fascination with the female body, including her own, is a constant theme in her work.

That Evans was attracted to women is incontrovertible. Her passionate sexual relationship with Ruth Farr, which began in 1934, two years after the publication of *Country Dance,* is chronicled in detail in her journals. This was a central relationship continuing over many years. The early descriptions of Ruth, 'a confessed and obvious Lesbian' (April 15th 1934)[28], in Evans's journal are also full of sensuality, a passionate rejoicing in their physicality:

> The line of her lips seemed so enthralling that my fingers wished almost of themselves to trace it; the short golden hairs on her temple and forehead, were magnets to them, and in her eyes and mine was all of passion that hands and arms do not contain but lead to (April 29th 1934)[29].

Olwen's importance in the imagination of her creator is evident from the second paragraph of Evans's Introduction to Ann's diary. Significantly, she is the only other person named along with Ann's two lovers, Gabriel and Evan, as the subjects of Ann's book, 'She writes of Gabriel, her sweetheart, English, jealous and sullen; of Evan ap Evans, her father's master, Welsh, violent and successful; of Olwen Davies, whose strange, whimsical beauty became the talk of the Border' (p.vii). Gabriel and Evan are identified by their opposing nationalities and described in terms that are negative or, at best, neutral, but beautiful Olwen is identified with the border, a border that is more than geographical for Olwen, for Ann, and arguably for her creator.

Marjorie Garber describes bisexuality thus: 'It is an identity that is also <u>not</u> an identity, a sign of the certainty of ambiguity, the stability of instability, a category that

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[27] Margiad Evans, *The Nightingale Silenced*, NLW, MS 23368B pp.46-7.
[28] NLW, MS 23366D, p.171/43.
[29] Ibid. p.177/47.

defies and defeats categorizations'[30]. It is appropriate that Evans explores sexual liminality for the first time in this novel of 'borders'. In it she brings about the death of her heroine who 'is the border'. Evans directs us to believe that this is to do with her 'mixed blood', with nationhood, but a possible reading is that the author was exploring the consequences, literal or metaphorical, of inhabiting a sexual borderland.

It is interesting to note that for Freud, and for his later followers, lesbian relationships arise as a consequence of a girl failing to separate properly from her mother: failing to transfer the love object from the mother to the father[31]. Furthermore, according to Nancy Chodorow, girls cannot and do not 'reject' their mother and women in favour of their father and men, but remain in a bisexual triangle throughout childhood and into puberty. Despite the emotional unavailability of the father, they usually make a sexual resolution in favour of men, but they tend to look to close relationships with women for love and emotional gratification. Lesbian relationships tend to recreate mother/daughter emotions and connections[32]. The importance of the mother/daughter relationship for both Ann and her creator has already been mentioned. In both cases the father's emotional unavailability is exacerbated by alcoholism. It seems that Evans was projecting her own deeply felt dilemmas on to her heroine.

Ann's body is a gendered body; it is also a body which speaks what words cannot. This theme is one which preoccupied Evans and in *Country Dance* she explores the body's power to speak in relation to Ann, but also in relation to other minor characters, for example Sian Pritchard and Abel Daw, whose marriage Ann records in her diary. Sian, like Ann, has mixed blood, but she inherits her Welsh blood from her father, her mother is English. Her English lover, Abel, keeps a draper's shop in Salus

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[30] Marjorie Garber, *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995), p.70.
[31] Sigmund Freud, *SE* XVIII, 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman' (1920), pp.147-172.
[32] Chodorow, pp. 140, 199, 200.

and when Sian first agreed to be his wife, her father was so enraged that he attacked Abel with a flail in front of her. He would have killed the young man had not Sian fallen into a fit at the sight. After this, Sian was so ill that her father promised never to cross her again as long as she recovered. For some years Abel stayed away, but then returned in response to a letter from Sian. Now her father must abide by his promise and accept the marriage, but Ann notes how his feelings remain as strong as ever: 'Her father is fair furious at the marriage, being a true Welshman that would have his daughter marry one of her own country, but her English mother is well content the girl should go back over the border' (p.54).

Sian's fit and its effect is highly significant in the light of Evans's treatment of illness in her subsequent writing. By falling into a fit, Sian expresses her horror of a situation where her father and lover have themselves resorted to action rather than words, expressing their anger and frustration in a fist fight. Sian's convulsing body speaks her desires more powerfully, more eloquently than any words could do. Elaine Showalter's description of hysteria is relevant here: 'Throughout history, hysteria has served as a form of expression, a body language for people who otherwise might not be able to speak or even to admit what they feel'[33]. Sian achieves her father's acquiescence to the marriage she desires, but as Diane Herndl points out, 'When women are taught that illness and death offer them the best route to power, we all suffer the loss of possibilities. There is nothing empowering about victimage'[34].

Ann is a victim; she dies at the hands of her rejected lover, but when her body is discovered it speaks powerfully for her: 'On her temple was a great wound that cried aloud for justice' (p.94). In her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World,* Elaine Scarry describes the body as the bridge between the self and the social

[33] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1998), p.7.
[34] Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), p.3.

world[35]. The wound on Ann's body can be read by the social world: it is a sign which tells of violence and seeks justice.

Evans directs the reader to the conclusion that Ann is mortally wounded because the culture of the borders does not permit her desire to reconcile her mixed heritage through marriage to a representative of either race. An alliance with one brings alienation and violence from the other and her body carries the scar. This is reflected in Beth Torgerson's theory that '...the body carries wounds, the signs of conflict, when there are discrepancies between what the self desires and what the culture allows'[36]. The divisive nature of border culture is so strong as to make Ann's attempts at reconciliation both futile and fatal. However, an alternative reading is that Ann's wound is the outward sign of an inner conflict brought about by her desire for Olwen, a desire which could neither be acknowledged nor allowed.

In *Country Dance*, then, the border is metaphorical as well as geographical. Ann with her mixed heritage represents the border and her creator claimed to be the border. 'Being the border', with its implications of split and division, the ability to look in two different directions, to be in two places at once, to be neither one thing nor the other – or perhaps both – all these paradoxes are seminal to Evans's work and are crucial to her perception of herself. She is at once Peggy, the artist and Margiad, the writer, and at other times, Arabella and Gwendolyn. The metaphorical border is a region which offers the possibility of inhabiting different personas, of realising different aspects of self, perhaps most importantly the transgressive self who could write of Olwen's 'whimsical beauty' and who could fall in love with Ruth Farr.

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[35] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.49.
[36] Beth E. Torgerson, *Reading the Bronte Body: Disease, Desire and the Constraints of Culture* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.5.

Ann is the first fictional character through whom Evans explores aspects of her own identity in her relationships with her parents; her sexuality; her embodiment of division and liminality. But it is Ann's identity as a writer which is crucial to the novel, illustrating as it does the fact that, although Ann's corporeal identity is vulnerable to attack and is destroyed, her book will remain to speak for her. As Evans remarks in her Conclusion, 'Those that can follow this will see that the story begins and ends with the book; for them there will be no need to follow the bodily fate of the men and women who people it'; the book stands 'Complete and triumphant' (p.95), even if open to interpretation.

Evans continued her project to establish her identity as a writer in her next novel, *The Wooden Doctor.* Again, the heroine is a writer, but this time she is closer to an alter ego as Evans draws on the verifiable facts of her own life to continue her exploration of themes introduced in *Country Dance*: identity; writing and the body; suffering and sexuality.

2

The Wooden Doctor: Aesthetic Autobiography

In 1933, only a year after *Country Dance* was published, Margiad Evans's second novel, *The Wooden Doctor,* appeared. In this novel she continues to explore the themes which preoccupied her in the first, although this time she relies for her story on events from her own life. I have suggested in the previous chapter that in *Country Dance* Evans projects aspects of herself on to the character of Ann; in *The Wooden Doctor* Evans's identification with her heroine is much closer. It is clear from her journals that Evans and her heroine, Arabella, share key feelings and experiences, including a home-life marred by an alcoholic father; the illness that brings the attention of the new young doctor; the passion he inspires, which Evans was still analysing in letters to her husband in 1946; and the realisation of an ambition to write. In this chapter, I will suggest that these elements are inextricably entwined: the illness, which may or may not be hysterical in origin, brings the attention and ministrations of the doctor whose love she craves. The doctor fails to reciprocate her passion – hence the epithet wooden; he fails even to cure her sickness, but crucially he provides her with a subject for her writing. The body and the book, and the relationship between them, are, therefore, central in this text. Both are related to Evans's continuing search for identity, particularly her identity as a writer, for what emerges as her prime concern in *The Wooden Doctor,* as I shall show, is a self- reflexive preoccupation with writing itself. For this reason, parallels can be drawn with Modernist self -reflexive texts, for example, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves.*

In *The Wooden Doctor* Evans is writing fictionalised autobiography, or, as Suzanne Nalbantian, describes it, 'aesthetic autobiography'[1]. Nalbantian looks at the writing of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin to analyse how they take the raw material of their lives and transform it into fiction. She notes how in all cases, 'in both revealing and concealing facets of their own autobiographical selves, these writers create evolving personalities through their drafts and early versions of their works'[2]. This process can also be traced in the work of Evans; she produced at least one unpublished draft of *The Wooden Doctor,* which was extensively reworked before the final version was published by Blackwell in 1933.

Nalbantian also points to the close relationship between the author's personal journals and their published work, especially in the case of Virginia Woolf whom she quotes. On February 8th 1926, Woolf wrote that her journal was to be 'rough material' for her 'masterpiece': the memoirs she intended to write when she reached sixty, and which appeared as *A Sketch of the Past* [3]. Evans used her own journals extensively in the writing of her overtly autobiographical texts, *Autobiography* and *A Ray of Darkness*, but as I shall show they also provided material for her novels. The earliest of her journals to survive covers the period 1933-4, and reveals that this was a time of high emotional intensity in her private life; this emotional intensity fuelled her 'fiction'.

When considering *The Wooden Doctor*, it is my contention that in her 'novel' Evans was offering a version of herself and events, but that other versions of equal validity exist. A journal entry for March 7th 1933 is indicative of the writer's perception that her novel contained 'truth'. She notes that *The Wooden Doctor* is meeting with 'high praise' and one commentator has found it 'the saddest book' he has ever read. She writes, 'Why should I feel triumph because a stranger finds my book tragic? Do I take it

[1] Suzanne Nalbantian, *Aesthetic Autobiography: From Life to Art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994).
[2] Nalbantian, p.57.
[3] Woolf, Virginia, Anne Olivier Bell, ed. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III: 1925-30* (London: Penguin, 1982), p.58.

as pleasing to have written much of the truth and to discover that others think that truth so sad?'(March 7th 1933)[4]. However, other versions of events with additions and omissions and differing emphases appear in the unpublished draft and in her journals and letters.

Despite her retrospective journal comment that her novel contains 'much of the truth', Evans begins it with a list of Principal Characters as in a play, with the words 'All characters in this book are purely imaginary'. There is a striking parallel here with the inside cover of *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes where he instructs the reader: 'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel'[5]. Barthes here tries to distance his autobiography from those in which the 'I' lays claim to a 'truth' untainted by novelistic devices. In Evans's case, her strenuous claim for the fictive nature of her work is significant. Carolyn Steedman remarks that the autobiographer can lie, 'bear false historical witness, whereas it is not possible to tell lies in the writing of fiction'[6]. In fiction the self can emerge, both as the self-conscious constructed self and the unconscious self of the sub-text, without censor or critic. My sense is that, in claiming her text as fiction, Evans gives herself unconscious permission to reveal herself. Significantly, Evans gives her alter ego, Arabella, the surname 'Warden' with all its connotations of policing, guarding, keeping in. An entry in Evans's journal for May 1934 reinforces this apparent contradiction:

> I can't bear to be known through self revelation in speech or writing. I want to hide everything – then to be seen by a few in spite of myself, in spite of subterfuge, contradiction, silence, even falsehood. Not to be remembered and understood by marks on paper but by signs in their minds. They must use their instincts and intuitions, all their insight if they want to discover me. While I run like a convict (June 3rd 1934)[7].

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[4] Margiad Evans, NLW MS 23366D, p.141/4.
[5] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1977).
[6] Caroline Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London: Rivers, Oram, 1992), p.125.
[7] NLW, MS 23366D, p.189/61.

Although this diary entry was written more than a year after the naming of Arabella Warden, her comparison of herself running from discovery, 'like a convict', shows how strong this metaphorical idea was in connection with self-revelation. Seeing herself as one convicted also implies that there is a crime which needs to be hidden. In her diary the transgression may be her passion for Ruth Farr; in the novel, Arabella has to be the Warden of many secrets including the nightmare shared only with her sister. Evans's determination to hide herself using silence and subterfuge shows an awareness that there are sides of herself needing to be searched out which she will try to hide in her writing. Her insistence on *The Wooden Doctor* as fiction can be seen as one of these subterfuges, an attempt by the author to manipulate the reader's response to her text.

Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, Evans's biographer, observes that in *The Wooden Doctor* Evans may have been trying to, 'make sense of events and feelings [she] had experienced by submitting them to a process of selection, ordering and imaginative reworking, imposing a narrative structure on what had seemed without shape or order'[8]. This analysis, however, seems inadequate, not least because the structure of the novel is episodic: scenes follow one another with little to link them apart from a loose chronology and Arabella's voice, which sometimes becomes confused with the author's.

An alternative, and I would suggest more fruitful approach to *The Wooden Doctor*, is to see it as a text which can be analysed in the same way as a patient is analysed for linguistic symptoms of unconscious processes during psychoanalysis. This seems to provide a particularly appropriate approach to *The Wooden Doctor,* given that its author acknowledged the use of 'subterfuge, contradiction, silence, even falsehood'

[8] Lloyd-Morgan, p.34.

(May 1934)[9], and given its fragmented narrative, its autobiographical material and its concentration on the interior life of its narrator.

The Body: Suffering and Sexuality

Arabella's suffering body, her perception of it and its actions is central to Evans's text. As Elizabeth Grosz remarks in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, 'All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscription and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface. Bodies have all the explanatory power of minds'[10].

Arabella's body is the first thing to confront the reader because it is the subject of the woodcut which Evans supplied as the frontispiece of her novel[11]. In the Honno edition published in 2005, it is reproduced on the front cover, but given a pink colour wash thus diluting the stark black and white of the original. The illustration is signed PW, the initial letters of her real name. In her journal she records going to the local pub for cigarettes and being told that her novel has been reviewed in the *Daily Mail*. She acquires a copy and is pleased and astonished to find a full size reproduction of the frontispiece, '...nobody knows I did that too' (March 17th 1933)[12]. Her pride in her artwork is equalled by her satisfaction that only she knows that Peggy Whistler and Margiad Evans are the same person. She is aware that she exists in different personae and she is also conscious of her desire to keep some aspects of herself separate and hidden.

Her illustration reinforces this as it shows a woman reclining, but only fragments of the body are visible; much is hidden. A jug and basin are shown in the foreground, suggesting that the subject is the narrator prostrated in bed suffering from the pain

[9] NLW, MS 23366D, p.189/61.
[10] Grosz, p.vii.
[11] See Appendix.
[12] NLW, MS 23366D, p.142/5.

which she graphically describes in the text which follows. The face is in profile, only half visible, the eye is closed and the expression unreadable. The abstract shapes which obscure the reclining body are angular and violent, suggestive perhaps of the fox, 'the terrible beast' which ravages her[13]. The claws which she says penetrated her sleep may be discerned (p.71). However, they are both there and not there according to the observer's eye. Peggy Whistler leaves gaps and spaces in her illustration just as Margiad Evans will in her narrative, preferring or unconsciously choosing obscurity over detail. The 'inscriptions on the corporeal surface' of the body shown in the woodcut suggest a fragmented self, an identity which lacks coherence.

Arabella's body at the beginning of the novel is just showing the first signs of puberty. In the opening pages the reader learns that Catherine, Arabella's older sister, has returned home from boarding school and for the first time has refused to bathe with her little sisters who notice with fascination her developing breasts. The following month, Esther, the youngest of the three girls, points out to Arabella that she no longer has a flat chest. Arabella responds angrily and contrasts her own physical unattractiveness with Catherine who is beautiful and Esther who has their father's 'beautiful, sensual lips' (p.5). Puberty, as Grosz observes, signals a girl's entry into her 'reproductive reality'; it involves menstruation associated 'with blood, with injury and the wound'[14]. Arabella seems to want to avoid making this transition for reasons that are never specified, one of the first silences in the novel.

Arabella's first encounter with the eponymous doctor happens only a few pages into the novel when she hears him calming her screaming sister who is about to receive a tetanus injection from the older doctor. His 'gentle, decisive tone reduced the hubbub to a murmur' (p.8). His words and his tone of voice have soothed not only the patient,

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[13] Margiad Evans, *The Wooden Doctor* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1933; repr. Dinas Powys: Honno, 2005), p.72.
Further references to the Honno edition are given after quotations in the text.
[14] Grosz, p.205.

but also the whole household. When the new doctor, Flaherty, is called again, this time to examine Arabella when she is sent home from school suffering from a fever, she is at this very delicate, sensitive stage of early puberty. She has a deep awareness of, as well as a problematic relationship to, her own body; she has a low opinion of her appearance and is disturbed by the evidence of her developing sexuality. This is the context in which the doctor first examines Arabella. Her account is highly charged with disturbing sexual overtones. Dr Flaherty, bending over her, unbuttons her nightgown and pushes it open to listen to her chest:

> As the stethoscope moved I suddenly knew terror, not of him not his machine - no, indeed – but of a dreadful, indescribable nightmare, a nightmare that came to us when we were wide-eyed, a nightmare that Esther shared with me and which we spoke about to each other and to nobody else. Everything glided smoothly, swiftly, flowing like the road beneath a car, then, oh, awful, oh, horror – chaos, weltering, tangled confusion (p.9).

The nature of this waking nightmare shared by her younger sister can only be guessed. However, the context in which it is brought on by the doctor pushing open her nightgown and the imagery and rhythm of the sentence about the swiftly flowing road culminating in chaos and confusion is suggestive of sexual abuse. This is reinforced by the next paragraph which describes the room spinning and her mother vanishing into a void. She then sees the doctor, 'at the end of a long, long tunnel and sobbed at what was coming' (p.9). However, the doctor smoothes her hair away from her burning face: 'His touch had cheated away the terror' (p.9). The fact that her mother is unable to help her in the long tunnel of her nightmare is telling. It is the doctor who assumes huge, almost talismanic significance because he can cure by touch alone a terror against which her own mother can offer no protection.

Evidence that this terror is linked to her father comes later in the novel when Arabella realises that there are things she should perhaps confess to her future husband, Oliver. 'It occurred to me forcefully that there were things I ought to tell him – about my father, and perhaps about the Wooden Doctor' (p.172). So they go out for an early

morning walk and she tells him, 'about my father and our savage home' (p.173). Oliver's response is that it makes no difference. However, she goes on:

> I could not tell him about the Irishman. I found no words, and really a man who marries is not concerned so much with the state of his wife's mind before he met her as with that of her body (p.173).

The clear implication is that the confession she fails to make about the Wooden Doctor is about her passionate feelings for him; whereas the confession about her father's savagery involves her body and that in an intimate way she feels might affect her future husband's feelings for her.

Arabella describes her father and the effect he has on their home in the Prelude to the novel. He was a 'habitual and incurable drunkard' whom his daughters regarded with 'terror and disgust' (p.10). They wished him or themselves dead:

> As we grew older there was less violence, and by that time little could touch us. Is there not proof, here on this paper, written in this hand, that I for one have achieved indifference? If there should appear a bitter line here and again, it is stale, a mood from the past that rose in invocation, and dispersed before the end of the sentence (p.11).

It is interesting that Arabella claims that the fact that she can write about it is proof of her having achieved indifference, but the vividness of her vocabulary on the following page belies her claim, 'We quarrelled among ourselves; fretted, isolated by our eccentricities, we sharpened our claws in one another's flesh. Our home among the quiet fields became a cage of savagery' (p.12).

The use of the word 'savagery', which she repeats in the conversation with Oliver, and the image of family members as beasts sharpening their claws in each other's flesh suggest extreme and brutal violence perpetrated on the body. The fact that this is a 'cage' of savagery also indicates that there was no escape for her. Writing as a means of dealing with and reducing the power of violent emotion is a recurring theme both in the novel and in Evans's journals. However, sometimes feelings and passions

cannot be subdued by language and emerge in repeated metaphors and images: claws and cages are examples of this.

Arabella's difficult relationship with her body as it shows signs of the woman she will become gives further credence to the theory that hers is a body which is suffering violation. Jeremy Holmes suggests that abuse by a family member leads to the sufferer pursuing one of two harmful attachment strategies, both of which involve the victim's own body. In the first, the sufferer resorts to an aspect of the self, or her body, as a 'pathological secure base' which manifests in self harm or eating disorders[15]. Here, the body attacks itself but the experience of attack offers comfort: self-harmers often report a feeling of calm following the injury. The second strategy involves the sufferer using her body as a 'surrogate secure base for self-soothing'[16]. In this model, according to Holmes, the 'secondary gain of showing the wound to professional carers further mobilises attachment behaviours'[17]. In the case of Arabella, she develops a mysterious illness, which is finally diagnosed as cystitis. It is this illness which brings the attention of the doctor, the same doctor who 'cheats the terror' of her waking nightmare with his touch and to whom she looks for the secure attachment which neither her mother nor her father can provide. Abuse is also linked with the development of multiple personality disorder. In order to disassociate from the trauma, the individual projects the events on to 'another'. Holmes also points to the fact that neuro-imaging techniques show that there is a difference in the way the brain processes traumatic and non-traumatic memories.

> Most memories are stored in the brain in the form of stories, sequences of events that can be verbally recalled and in which the sensory and emotional aspects of the memory remain in the background. Traumatic memories seem to exist in a 'raw' sensory form, in which a coherent verbal account is hard to elicit (p.100).

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[15] Jeremy Holmes, *The Search for the Secure Base: Attachment Theory and Psychotherapy* (Sussex: Routledge, 2001), p.97.
[16] Holmes, p.100.
[17] Holmes, p.100.

Holmes goes on to describe how the capacity to hold on to a personal narrative is severely compromised among sufferers from abuse, 'reality and fantasy may be confused, fact and fiction conflated'[18]. It is my contention that in her novel, Evans suggests that Arabella has been abused by her father. It is impossible to know whether this was a real or symbolic event in the author's own life, but given the many parallels it is tempting to accept that it was on some level also true for her. If Holmes's theory is correct, this would help to explain Evans's confusion of reality and fantasy; fact and fiction.

Evans's use of names in her Journal and the draft and published versions of *The Wooden Doctor* may also suggest a form of multiple personality disorder. In her journal, she often refers to herself as Arabella, the name of her 'fictional' heroine, while in the draft version of the novel she writes her own name Peggy, before crossing it out and substituting Arabella. To an analyst all versions of herself - Peggy, Arabella, Margiad - would be 'true' either literally or symbolically. The confusion is hers: she obfuscates and resists analysis. She runs, 'like a convict.'

It is significant that the occasions when she uses the name Arabella to address herself in the journals are almost exclusively times when she is in a highly emotional state. In 1934, soon after the publication of *The Wooden Doctor*, Evans embarked on a passionate affair with Ruth Farr. Another entry later in the same month reads, 'I'm in flames and burning. Run, Arabella, run. A physical tie connects us so that we can hardly tear ourselves apart'[19]. This dramatic entry is ambiguous. In the context of other journal entries, the 'we' seems to refer to herself and Ruth, but given her use of the name Arabella it could also reflect her sense of herself as divided: Arabella is passionately attracted to Ruth and cannot be separated from Peggy or Margiad. In June of the same

[18] Holmes, p.101.
[19] Ibid. p.176/46.

year, in passages where many lines have been heavily scored through with black ink and a page cut out, 'I can't go to sleep...Thrown on my own strength so suddenly in the night, help me rude fierce Arabella, help me to live tomorrow for you. To be. Not to tell; and not to be tracked to my heart' (June 15th 1934), hence the blackened pages, her attempt to erase the evidence of her being[20].

The Arabella of the journals is a lesbian; the phrase 'tracked to my heart' recalls the image of the fugitive convict who needs to stay hidden. In her journal Evans, addressing herself as Arabella, recognises the need not to reveal her secrets; the black ink and torn pages are evidence of the self-censor. Arabella in *The Wooden Doctor*, although seemingly heterosexual, is more than usually interested in and affected by the physical presence of other women. As noted in the previous chapter, this latent lesbianism is much more evident in an unpublished draft of the novel, in which Arabella, while teaching in Brittany, is attracted to Renée Maréchal, the mother of one of her pupils. Part of Mme Maréchal's attraction for Arabella is her look of pain and suffering and her conviction that Renée 'was...no puppet to enter one's life but a potent influence to leave a mark wherever her touch might rest'[21].

In an exchange in which Renée remarks to Arabella that she is old enough to be her mother, the name Peggy has been crossed out and Arabella substituted, indicating the close identification between writer and subject. During this episode Arabella displays an intense awareness of her own physicality and that of Renée; one seems mirrored in the other. Arabella watches her own reflection as she dresses, 'raising and lowering my arms with dollish stiffness, marking the taughtening and relaxing of my breasts'[22], before watching Renée, 'She bathed her face and shoulders and arms. The

[20] Ibid. p.207/68
[21] Margiad Evans, *The Wooden Doctor*, Draft NLW MS 23357B, p.111.
[22] Ibid. p.134.

vertibrae [*sic*] protruded, the pale fine skin shone on each little knob with the soft lustre of a pearl'[23].

These details, together with the fact that they constantly touch and kiss each other, lend the story an undeniable eroticism. The climax of their relationship comes with a 'confession' Renée makes to Arabella. She speaks of 'Man and her experience of him: whether she spoke in English or French I cannot recall only that her wild fierce resentful confession was most truly, most terribly, most agonisingly clear[24]. However, Arabella's account of this confession is far from transparent. We learn that Renée's account of her experience deprives Arabella of any hope in the possibility 'of tenderness, or kindness in living'; it terrifies her and leaves her feeling in desperate need of comfort. She wishes to extend sympathy to her friend but is afraid:

> My hand she might strike aside as being the flesh that broke her.
> I said: 'Jacqueline'.
> Her face changed: if that were to her a pledge of help, I had mine also who could as potently protect me. We parted at dawn and at dawn I wrote to the wooden doctor[25].

The odd parallel between Arabella's hand and the 'flesh that broke her' together with Arabella's terror and Renée's extreme distress might suggest that Renée is confessing to having been the victim of rape. Perhaps Arabella finds echoes of her own experience in Renée's confession and they comfort each other: the two spend the night together before Arabella turns again to the wooden doctor to protect her from 'terror'. The link between the two relationships is made explicit later in the draft when at a time of emotional turmoil she notes that, 'A year ago I should have written to Renée Maréchal, two months ago to the wooden doctor'[26].

The intimate relationship between Arabella and Renée Maréchal is erased from the published version of *The Wooden Doctor*; it seems likely that this was one of the

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[23] Ibid. p.136.
[24] Ibid. p.139.
[25] Ibid. pp.139-40.
[26] NLW, MS 23357B p.181.

author's attempts at concealment and subterfuge. However, the character remains as an attractive and alluring figure: she is 'enchantingly slender and elegant' (p.36) with 'long graceful legs' and the intonation of her speaking voice is 'undulating and caressing' which Arabella finds 'magical' (p.37). The hints of sexual attraction are there. Other women in the novel attract Arabella's appreciative attention: a servant with 'most beautiful legs' (p.75); a hospital matron in a figure-hugging blue alpaca gown looking 'at once severe and sensual' (p.75); Mrs de Kuyper, the mother of one of Arabella's former pupils, wearing a close fitting black velvet dress (p.103); and her cousin whose beautiful face with 'laughing, shining eyes' and 'cunning mouth' (p.122) tortures her. Arabella's interest in the female body extends to her art; she wants to draw the naked female form. She is also intensely aware of her own body, stripping naked in the garden and happily bathing in the presence of the nurses while in hospital. Passages from the journals indicate that Evans uses the character of Arabella to explore her own fascination with the female body, as in this example from May 1934:

> One acts strange when one's naked: the shoulders swing, the arms glide, the back arches inwards and the breasts expand in the air...I stripped to the waist this afternoon and sprayed powder on me. My black clothes lay in folds above my hips. I longed to watch myself. Then came the wish to stretch out on the grass. I did not [27].

Arabella's gaze goes beyond casual observation; the sensuous quality of the language suggests a sexual, erotic aspect to her appreciation of the female body. In a journal entry for July 1934, in some lines addressed to Basil Blackwell, her publisher, Evans refers to herself as Arabella. Blackwell appears frequently in the journals; possibly influenced by Charlotte Brontë, Evans often calls him the Professor. In common with Brontë, Evans harboured romantic feelings for her professor: in a journal entry for July 1934, she addressed him:

[27] NLW, MS 23366D, p.181/53.

> You have a peculiar effect on me, which might at any time during the last eighteen months have touched me into open passionate love, if you had wanted it, and then, I swear, there would have been no Ruth. Yet in many ways the Arabella you think you understand, indeed the Arabella that you do understand is strongly detestable to me. I feel that exalted body is an interior ulcer oozing oil, and a faded [sort?] ascetism decks the cheekbones. There's the strong odour of martyrism [*sic*] about her. But believe me finally, to my disquiet I am discovering that person is my true self, and that guise my natural garment! Oh how I am torn, how I am harried, how I am jaded and fagged! I do assure you that reason is pushed to the very boundary line (July 3rd 1934)[28].

Evans is aware of Arabella as an aspect of her 'true self', one about which she clearly feels ambivalent and which drives her almost to madness. In her journal, Evans perceives Arabella her alter ego's body in terms of disease, a weeping ulcer, and in *The Wooden Doctor* Arabella's body does indeed sicken.

Some years after her first encounter with Dr Flaherty, Arabella, now sixteen, returns from a period spent in Brittany as a teaching assistant suffering from severe pain. The Wooden Doctor diagnoses cystitis (p.71). Arabella conveys the pain vividly: 'In the night the pain came back. It was like a fox in a bag scratching and rending to get out. My spirits trailed in the dust. The claws penetrated my sleep' (p.71). 'I insisted upon getting up. I would not abase my existence before the fox that had entered into my body' (p.72). Arabella sees her pain as a creature, linked in folklore with wiliness and cunning. The fox is a predator lurking in the darkness ready to pounce on innocent, defenceless inhabitants of coop and field, rending and devouring them. Her pain is such a creature and it has actually entered her body. This metaphor is also directly linked with her home which she describes early in the novel as 'a cage of savagery' (p.12) where family members sharpened their claws in each other's flesh. These striking linguistic clues seem to point to a link between the disease and its possible cause: abuse by her father – cystitis often being caused by sexual activity.

[28] NLW, MS 23366D, p.221/80.

The doctor tries to cure her of the pain, but can do no more than cut the claws of the fox, giving her temporary relief before suddenly the creature attacks again, springing, 'with flaming feet and famished jaws, rending, biting, tearing' (p.72). The repetition of the word 'rending' is also suggestive of violation: she feels torn apart by the searing pain. She goes back to the doctor and tells him she can stand no more. He examines her: 'He stretched me on a couch and stuck all kinds of instruments up me. They hurt very much, and I should have hated anybody else to do it' (p.74). Following the fox which entered her, Arabella's body again suffers violation, but the crucial difference is that this time the perpetrator is her beloved doctor.

He can find nothing wrong and refers her to a specialist. She endures two periods of medical investigation, both of which involve admission to hospital. Neither of them provides a definitive diagnosis or programme of treatment. When, on the first occasion she discovers that the wooden doctor has paid for her treatment, she is 'thrilled...with delight' (p.78). She dreams of him while in hospital and on being told that the hospital examination has revealed nothing wrong and that there is nothing to be done, she says, 'Shut up with the beast for the rest of my life. The image of the Wooden Doctor alone between me and despair, between me and the fox's mask' (p.80). The language echoes the first time the doctor stood between her and the terror of her waking nightmare (p.90). This time the image of the doctor stands between her and the fox's mask, the mask providing a further sinister layer of disguise perhaps concealing the trauma which has brought about the pain. Now she is comforted by the doctor's touch and can tolerate, even welcome, his invasive and intimate examinations because he stands between her and the 'fox'.

Arabella's pain brings the attention of the doctor. Freud famously suggested that one of the ways that the unconscious can struggle to the surface is through psychosomatic symptoms and illness. Unconscious desires seek expression; the ego

forces them to be blocked and repressed. The internal conflict leads to neurosis and results in symptoms which simultaneously protect and covertly express unconscious desire[29]. Arabella's cystitis can be interpreted in this way: through her illness she can express her desire for the doctor and gain the attention she craves.

Showalter makes the same point about hysteria: 'Throughout history, hysteria has served as a form of expression, a body language for people who otherwise might not be able to speak or even admit what they feel[30]. According to Arthur Kleinman, where there is illness there is 'unresolved conflict' in the life between what one desires and what is expected, between what one desires and what is available, or perhaps between two conflicting desires[31]. In a more recent formulation, Linda Ruth Williams describes 'conversion hysteria' as occurring when a patient 'converts' unresolved mental phenomena into bodily symptoms. 'With conversion hysteria ...the body of the hysteric literally "speaks" with a body language which expresses symbolically something which cannot otherwise be spoken'[32].

The significance of Arabella's cystitis is illuminated by these theories. Whether hysterical or physiological in origin, whether the result of abuse or not, Arabella's body speaks and can be read like a text by both doctors and readers. Arabella's body in its pain calls for the attention of the doctor with whom she is obsessed; his medical instruments enact the sexual encounter she unconsciously both fears and desires. Her body speaks the words she cannot articulate.

Arabella's second visit to hospital is longer, but the result is no more satisfactory. During the exploratory investigations Arabella comments that 'the fox

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[29] Sigmund Freud, *SE* II (with J. Breuer), *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), p.3ff and p.255ff.
[30] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1977), p.7.
[31] Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition* (USA: Basic Books Inc., 1988), pp.97-9.
[32] Linda Ruth Williams, *Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1995), p.5.

itself had often hurt me more,' but then, tracked to the source of its being, the fox 'twisted and turned within me' (p.96). However, in the hours after the procedure she suffers great pain, which increases with every moment. A student nurse offers milk:

> She raised my head on her arm to give me the milk, when I told her that I could not hold it, clumsily and tenderly. It was more comforting than any deftness. But I could not drink it. The pain did not diminish, it increased with every moment. I felt as though I were transfixed with a fiery sword (p.98).

The nurse cradles her patient's head tenderly, as a mother might cradle her child and Arabella finds the experience comforting, but still she cannot drink the milk. The efficacy of milk against 'the fox' is mentioned during an earlier attack when Arabella warms some milk and drinks it remarking 'The fox hated milk, so did I. Gradually I was relieved, but I felt exhausted and helpless' (p.73). Milk, symbol of the vital nurturing maternal role, can vanquish the fox. Arabella drinks it, although she hates it and it leaves her feeling helpless, like a child. However, milk cannot relieve the extremity of pain she feels in hospital which she compares to being transfixed by a fiery sword. The sexual nature of this imagery suggests an opposition between her abuser, represented by the sword, and her mother, represented by the milk. Just as her mother 'vanished into the void,' unable to defend her daughter when terrified by the waking nightmare, so milk can provide no solace or defence against the fiery sword.

Arabella's ambivalence about milk works as a metaphor for her feelings about her mother. Throughout the novel, Arabella's relationship with her mother is troubled. When she returns from hospital the second time she finds the house locked against her. Her sister lets her in and tells of a row she has just had with their mother, ending her account with, 'She's mad' (p.101). Their mother then 'sweeps tragically into the room' and asks Arabella whether she is to have an operation. Her response on hearing that the hospital could find nothing wrong injures Arabella by its coldness: 'It just bears out what I have thought all the time...that it's nothing but nerves' (p.102).

But when Arabella begins to describe her experiences in the hospital her mother passionately embraces her and tells her she loves her. Arabella 'did not believe her'.

There are notable silences and words unspoken in the account of Arabella's homecoming. She and her sister Esther exchange 'a hopeless glance' and after her mother's avowal of love the sisters' 'eyes met with deep understanding' (p.102). The reader is left to consider the meaning of these looks. A likely interpretation is that just as the sisters share the secret terror of the nightmare, so they share a conviction that their mother's words of love are empty, impotent. There are more unspoken words when one of the patients in the hospital reminds Arabella of her mother:

> I thought of our own old devotion to each other, lying dead between us, killed by cruel words, senseless misunderstandings, wild and wicked recriminations...I saw the future bearing down upon us, crushing my mother before my eyes, and I had been cruel to her...Worst of all, I knew that, dying, we should not want each other. She had no human tie, and I, in the hour of danger, longed for my Wooden Doctor only (p.92).

There are many mysteries in this passage: what could be the cause of the misunderstandings and recriminations; what had drawn forth such cruelty and why is a wife and mother of three described as having no human tie? Whatever the reasons, there is a great lack in Arabella's relationship with her mother, a void which only the wooden doctor can fill.

The gaps and silences discussed above, which could be described as constituting a strand of the novel's unconscious, can be illuminated by looking at Evans's references to her mother in her Journal of 1933-4. Mrs Whistler herself seems to have been in a highly disturbed state, repeatedly leaving home and having to be brought back by one of her daughters. The impression given is of extremely volatile and emotionally charged relationships between Evans, her sister, their mother and their friends, including Ruth Farr. Emotion is at such a pitch in May 1934 that Evans feels she is losing her sense of

identity: 'It's hopeless, impossible to come to grips with myself...I can't get at myself, and nobody can get at me. I feel crushed at last. Mother has gone away again' (May 1934)[33]. She describes 'impossible situations...jealousy, distrust, betrayal, deceit and pain. Our friendship with Ruth Farr. Our love for Ruth Farr. Nancy, Margery, Ruth – myself. Crash...I thought Ruth and I were lovers'[34]. But something has been said between the sisters, Peggy and Nancy, which has made Peggy and Ruth's love 'homeless' and Peggy writes her devastation into her diary:

> There's nothing left of her (Ruth) but the recollection of the ghostly fire in my chest which craved her touch; a cancer on my lips and my breast like mother's lopped and bitter bosom on whose poisoned veins I would perversely lean my head, feeling the same vindictive corrosive blood pour through me, as if I were in her womb (May, 1934)[35].

Disturbing images are conflated in these lines. The writer compares the longed for touch of her lover with a cancer on her lips and chest which in turn relates to her mother's 'lopped and bitter bosom'. This sounds very much like a reference to a mastectomy scar. No other reference has been found in the archives to confirm this, but family members have some memory that Mrs Whistler suffered from breast cancer[36]. Whether literally true or not, the lopped bosom can be read as a metaphor for a mother who failed to provide vital nourishment and succour for her daughter. This would explain why, for Evans, the desire to lean her head on her mother's breast is a perversion, for it cannot satisfy her hunger. The perversion is compounded by her desire to feel connected through her blood as she was when in the womb, even though that blood is 'vindictive and corrosive'. These lines also echo the passage in the novel quoted above when Arabella finds the nurse's motherly touch comforting despite being unable to drink the proffered milk, a drink which she dislikes, but which has some power to take away pain.

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[33] NLW, MS 23366D, p.183/56.
[34] Ibid. p.184/56.
[35] NLW, MS 23366D, p.184/56.
[36] Jim Pratt, *Discussion of Mrs Whistler's medical history* [email]. Personal communication, 29th January 2010. Jim Pratt, Evans's nephew, wrote, 'My sister says that Granny (Mrs Whistler) did have breast cancer'.

Peggy/Arabella's need for her wooden doctor and her passionate attraction to other women can be explained in terms of her troubled relationships with both her mother and her father. Freudian theory suggests that for girls and boys the mother is the first love object because she is normally the primary caregiver of the very young infant. The task for a female child is to transfer from mother to father as primary love object in order to make a successful heterosexual resolution of the Oedipus crisis[37]. For Peggy/Arabella her father is unavailable or inappropriate in this role, which seriously compromises her ability to resolve the Oedipus crisis comfortably. Significantly, research shows that experience of abuse often results in gender precariousness and a high degree of splitting and projection[38]. Evans shows in her novel how she seeks an alternative father figure in the form of the wooden doctor and demonstrates her profound uncertainty about heterosexuality by developing a sexual attachment to another woman, although the substantial Renée Maréchal episode is omitted from the final draft.

Peggy/Arabella's troubled relationship with her mother also influences her sexual orientation. Nancy Chodorow asserts that women never abandon the mother as primary internal object and that they remain in a 'bisexual triangle' throughout childhood and into puberty[39]. Following Freud, she notes that most girls choose heterosexuality, but crucially this depends on the behaviour of the father during adolescence. Chodorow asserts that the father's role at this stage of his daughter's development is to 'feminise' her by offering love and tenderness if she accepts the female role[40]. However, she suggests that fathers are more distant from their daughters than mothers so the relationship between fathers and daughters exists largely in fantasy

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[37] Sigmund Freud, *SE* XI, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1910), p171ff; *SE* XIX, *The Ego and the Id and Other Works* (1923-25), pp.248-252.
[38] Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Contemporary States of Mind* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p.91.
[39] Chodorow, p.140.
[40] Chodorow, p.139.

and idealization. Even if the girl chooses in favour of men she will seek in future adult relationships for gratifications she found in her relation to her mother. Furthermore, Chodorow quotes Alice Balint who suggests that if the girl experiences a mother who is cold and who fails to offer sufficient nurturing then because the child's love for her is unappeased, the necessary loosening of the bond between them does not take place[41]. The consequence of this for the girl's adult relationships is that she will be forever seeking a mother substitute who will fulfil the immature wants and needs that have so far been unsatisfied.

In the relationship between Arabella and Renée Maréchal, described in the unpublished draft of *The Wooden Doctor*, Renée can be seen to provide a mother substitute for Arabella. In an exchange where Renée remarks to Arabella that she is old enough to be her mother, the name Peggy has been crossed out and Arabella substituted, indicating the close identification of writer and subject. Given that Peggy spent time in Brittany as a pupil teacher, and that she draws heavily on felt emotion in her portrayal of the other relationships she describes in her novel, it seems likely that her encounter with Mme Maréchal was also based on a lived experience.

Although Peggy's relationship with Ruth Farr started in about May 1934, the year after the publication of *The Wooden Doctor*, there is ample evidence in the journals to show that, in Ruth, Peggy was seeking a mother figure and how deeply implicated her mother was in that search. In an entry for June 1934, addressed to her mother, Peggy writes:

> You pushed Ruth at us. An atrocious sexual contest was the result, and in your savage egotism you never noticed and by leaving then you did us down. You never did a worse thing at a worse moment (June 29th 1934)[42].

[41] Chodorow, p.135.
[42] NLW, MS 23366D pp. 219/78-79.

Peggy is accusing her mother of abandoning her daughters to compete for Ruth whom she has introduced into the household. Ruth may be able to provide the nourishing breast so far denied to Peggy and her sisters. A furious contest ensues, which Peggy wins, and she describes the comfort she derives from sleeping with Ruth, 'To be close to each other, so that we have only to turn to hold each other, is bliss and peace' (May 10th 1934)[43]. However much solace she takes in her relationship with Ruth, she still blames her mother for neglecting them out of 'savage egotism', another repetition of the word 'savage' in connection with parents and/or the parental home.

In the novel, the wooden doctor becomes a surrogate parent for Arabella. Most explicitly he stands in for her father, but there are also suggestions that he provided some of the nurturing that she might have expected from her mother. When she is in Brittany, the directrice of the school writes to Arabella's mother complaining of her behaviour: she has formed a friendship with a young Englishman. Arabella's mother writes back to both the directrice and Arabella, siding with the former and apologising for her daughter's bad behaviour. Arabella describes her mother's letter as 'bitter and biting' (p.54). She imagines by contrast how she thinks the doctor would have reacted:

> The Irishman would not have judged so harshly, nor so cruelly condemned...He was, indeed, of this world. Never shocked he drew truth from me as nobody else could; to him I told my faults as studiously as I laboured to conceal them from others. He has called himself my Father-Confessor: he was more. Against vice, brutality, stupidity and evil, I weighed this one man whose puissant image was the strongest influence in my life, and he more than balanced all (pp.54-5).

The suggestion here is that he is more than either father or mother. He is her Father-Confessor, an almost God-like figure whose image can ward off vice, brutality and evil – in other words, the 'terror' (p.9) of her 'savage' home (p.12), and the fox's mask (p.80), and her mother's 'biting' words. The original title of the novel, *The Divine Image*, reinforces this aspect of the doctor's significance for Arabella.

[43] NLW, MS 23366D, p. 179/49.

She repeatedly insists that the doctor is the only person to whom she can tell the truth. In a passage in which she reflects on her 'adored Irish doctor', when challenged about whether she ever speaks the truth she replies 'sometimes' before thinking again of her Irishman, to whom she has never lied (p.41). Later in the novel when she thinks that the relationship she craves with the wooden doctor is impossible she lies to her mother and is 'stabbed through and through' with the thought that if she can no longer communicate with the doctor, then there is no-one to whom she can tell the truth (p.121). I suggest that the vehicle she finds for 'truth' when the wooden doctor fails her is the book she writes.

The arrival of a disappointing letter from the doctor while she is in hospital prompts Arabella to ponder the nature of his attraction for her, 'Why should I have this strong feeling for a man who never gave two thoughts to me? What was he – a divine image or a mute; a death's head in my mental revelry?' (p.95). The divine image idea is repeated along with some striking alternatives: a 'mute' unable to answer her need or a 'death's head', the product of her fevered imagination.

The next reference to him is presented as a retrospective account narrated late in the evening while Arabella is staying the night with a former employer, Mrs de Kuyper. Her evening with them is recounted in sensuous detail, especially the description of Mrs de Kuyper who has 'fine arched brows' and 'long green eyes full of life and experience'. She is wearing 'a black velvet dress that fitted to her figure' and 'pearl earrings swung when she moved her head' (p.103). She is sitting with two men: her husband and her secretary who, we are told, both love her. Later in the evening:

> She rose, lifted her skirt above her knees, displaying her beautiful straight legs and arched insteps, and began to dance. Her feet tapped like castanets, the black folds of velvet whirled and swathed her hips. Her eyes half closed, she watched her effect on the two men with a smile parting her painted lips (p.105).

The impression is of a woman, revelling in the power of her sexuality. The narrator, who also appears mesmerised by her, can smell the perfume rising from her skin in her welcoming embrace. The perfume, we are told, is called 'Adieu Sagesse', a name in keeping with the atmosphere of abandon and sexual licence – 'Farewell Wisdom'. The narrator also remarks that she owes what little she knows of the world to Mrs de Kuyper (p.104).

The atmosphere of emotional and sexual tension clearly affects Arabella, encouraging her to demonstrate that through her passion for Dr Flaherty she too has abandoned wisdom. On retiring to her room, she describes how, earlier that morning, she had impetuously confronted the doctor with her feelings: 'I was no longer a child; and I realised that I loved him with all the affection and passion that stored in my heart could find no other outlet' (p.106). She opened the conversation with, 'Papa-doctor, I am going away' (p.106). This is the first of several times she addresses him as Papa. Describing her thoughts during their conversation she says, 'All these years...all these years, since I was a child of twelve, and still he would not take me home. How much longer must I wander aimlessly, how much longer, or for all my life?' (p.106). That night she dreams that she is back at the doctor's house ringing his doorbell and crying, 'Let me in, Papa, this is my home' (p.108).

These lines illustrate the power of Arabella's perception that the doctor is a father figure and that he represents 'home'. She says he is the only person on earth she loves and yearns to tell him her secrets:

> My heart felt the need to share all its secrets with him. My lips held them locked. One day I would have to tell him what could no longer be borne alone: not for consummation, not in hope; for ease, in desperation (p.107).

This is an example of one of the novel's silences. The reader/analyst has to supply the meaning, has to infer what secrets Arabella so desperately needs to share. The section

finishes with a link back to Mrs de Kuyper: 'Oh, what a fool! Adieu, adieu, adieu...sagesse' (p.108). Like Mrs de Kuyper courting sexual danger by dancing seductively in front of her husband, her admirer and Arabella herself, Arabella has courted sexual danger by showing her feelings to the doctor, and also perhaps in responding to Mrs de Kuyper's allure. In so doing, both have bidden farewell to wisdom.

Arabella affects to have forgotten in her 'chaotic state' how her feelings came to be revealed to her Papa-doctor; she just knows that her 'frail and narrow vessel' could no longer contain the strength of these feelings (p.113). However, the revelation ushers in a period of intense misery for her as Dr Flaherty in a letter tells her that he can be no more than her Father Confessor. She realises that he has always thought of her as a child and treated her as if he were her 'tender and indulgent father' (p.114). She cannot accept the contents of the letter, but feels compelled to face him. He reminds her of the age difference, 'I am old enough to be your father' (p.118). Arabella writes, 'It was death. He did not love me' (p.118).

That father and lover are inextricably linked in Arabella's perception is emphasized at the end of the interview when the doctor kisses her on the lips for the first and only time in response to her request, 'Kiss me, Papa.' At the end of the novel, Arabella agrees to marry a young man, Oliver, whom she meets at the farm in North Wales where she has gone to finish her book. She really believes that she might find happiness with him until she returns home and encounters the doctor in the street.

> 'Arabella, are ye back again?'
> 'Oh, Papa-' I stammered.
> It looks absurd written down, the conviction that I could not marry any other man (p.176).

Oliver is summarily dismissed and the book finishes only six lines later with the doctor marrying a 'young girl'.

In a letter written to her husband, Michael Williams, on January 24th 1946, thirteen years after the publication of this fictionalised account of her infatuation with the doctor, Evans tells him of a conversation she has just had with a friend, following seeing Dr Dunlop, the model for Flaherty, in the street. The friend assured her that she was better off with Mike than the doctor who was too old for her.

> I said I knew it...But there are times when I feel sad that I can't speak to Dr Dunlop first to tell him that my feelings in a way have never changed. You see I don't think I ever wanted him particularly to marry me. I asked him to adopt me! And that I think would have worked (Jan 24th 1946) [44].

In Arabella, Evans is presenting a version of her own experience: Arabella, like her creator, longs for a substitute father, and turns to the doctor who offers a cure for the intimate pain which strikes at the core of her sexual self, like a frenzied fox rending the 'fleshy cage' (p.81), the body. It is clear that the fox represents not just the disease, but the sufferer's sexuality, which she yearns to express but which is confined and repressed due to the confused emotions called up by 'Papa-doctor'.

In Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1917) he deals with the issue of transference. He describes how a woman in an unhappy marriage may be 'seized with a serious passion for a doctor who is still unattached'. She may be prepared to seek a divorce or even enter into a secret liaison with him:

> Such things come about even outside psychoanalysis. But in these circumstances we are astonished to hear declarations by married women and girls which bear witness to a quite particular attitude to the therapeutic problem: they had always known, they say, that they could only be cured by love [45].

Freud goes on to point out the importance of showing the patient that this love is a repetition of a previous experience and not the product of the present situation. He also observed a tendency for people to repeat unsatisfactory relationship patterns hoping in

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[44] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 811.
[45] Sigmund Freud , *SE* XVI, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (First pub. London: Hogarth, 1963; repr. 1991), p.441.

each case for a different resolution. It is hard not to conclude that for Evans, her love for her doctor was the transference of the compromised love she felt for her father.

When writing of her love for the doctor and his response to her, Arabella uses images of the body. In the draft version Arabella observes, 'He grew into my rebellious heart as my very flesh'[46]. Her feelings for the doctor are so strong that she feels that she assimilates him into her own body; he becomes part of her 'very flesh'. But in a strangely ambiguous statement she laments a few lines later, 'My body trembled with fatigue, I was worn without wear, weary without labour [47]. In the published text, this becomes more overtly sexual: 'I was exhausted without possession; I was worn without wear' (p.123).

Her body is exhausted, but it suffers not as a result of physical possession, but from the power of her emotions. This idea is reinforced when she realises that her body is unable to contain her love for him; it must be spoken. This is graphically expressed in the draft:

> When questioned by the doctor I could not truthfully say that I had any grounds for thinking myself of any value to him. The fact was rather that my own love for him as a passion had come to uncontrollable strength; my body was too narrow, too frail a vessel to hold it longer in captivity[48].

The same idea survives, elided slightly, in the published version (p.113). Arabella's body is weak and narrow, not up to the tremendous task of containing her passion. It overflows the limits of her body and the doctor becomes aware of her love. He assures her that it cannot be and that in time she will forget him and this will be a cure. For Arabella this is inconceivable: her body has been wounded by her love, 'He could not lay a hand upon the wound, because he denied that it existed' (p.119).

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[46] NLW, MS 23357B, p.142.
[47] Ibid. pp.142-3.
[48] Ibid. p.152.

When the doctor rejects her love her perception is of a body and mind which become split and almost disappear:

> My twenty two years of living had left no more impression on things or people than a breath of air. I felt that had I died then, or run away to the mountains as I craved to do, and hidden my demented self among the clouds and crags instead of thinly veiling it in my own undesired flesh, none would have missed my presence or marked my absence more than a single dewdrop (p.123).

The version of these lines in the earlier draft is even more powerful:

> I felt that had I died then, or run away to the mountains as I longed to do, and hide my demented agony among their craggy bones instead of thinly covering it in my undesired flesh, none would have missed my presence or marked my absence more than a single dew drop[49].

In the MS version the mountains are seen as a substitute body; their 'craggy bones' provide a more suitable housing for her 'demented agony' than her 'undesired flesh', because the knowledge that her flesh is undesired only serves to exacerbate her agony. Her identity, her sense of herself, depends, for its validation, on the doctor's love. Notable also in this quotation is the close identification between body and earth which emerges strongly in Evans's later writing, especially *Autobiography.*

With the certainty that the doctor does not reciprocate her passion, Arabella's body which has insisted through pain on its physicality, now begins to fade altogether, 'It was death. He did not love me. He would never love me' (p.118). Her body and that of the object of her desire become ghosts, the living dead, both real and unreal: 'Was there really a ghostly Arabella who loved a ghostly doctor, so short a while ago? Yes, and like other ghosts, they rise and wander restlessly among the living of the present'[50].

At the end of the novel, after a passionately physical embrace with Oliver when she says that had their bodies been separated then she would have died from want of

[49] NLW, MS 23357B, pp.160-1.
[50] NLW, MS 23357B, p.150.

him, Arabella turns down his proposal of marriage because there is the ghost of another man to whom she has surrendered her spirit (p.168). She might love Oliver with her whole heart, but never with her soul (p.169). For Arabella, the spiritual has more power than the corporeal.

Metaphors of ghostly presences and hauntings: the body that is both there and not there, appear frequently in Evans's writing. In the MS draft Arabella, speaking of her mother, says: 'While I was a child we loved each other passionately. We had a terrible power of haunting each other'[51]. Jeremy Holmes cites a paper by Fraiberg et al. who suggest that there are ghosts present in every nursery. These ghosts are 'the visitors from the unremembered past of the parents' which transmit from generation to generation a story or script around which psychological development takes place[52]. According to Holmes, getting in touch with these ghosts, these influences from the past can be extremely painful as they are so deeply ingrained, affecting every aspect of experience: 'It is as though ghosts are inscribed on (and in) the body'[53]. It is significant, therefore, that Arabella feels herself to be haunted by both her mother and her Papa-doctor and that these hauntings paralyse her to the extent that her sighting of the doctor marks not only the end of her affair with Oliver, but also the end of her text.

At moments in the narrative when Arabella's body seems most in danger of disintegration she attempts to make it real by inscribing marks on the bodies of others. Elaine Scarry writing on Thomas Hardy talks about 'embodiment', by which she means the way his characters are vividly realised through their reciprocal relationship with the environment[54]. In *The Woodlanders* Grace Melbury's father carefully preserves her footprint in the earth under a stone; flakes of paint transfer from a gate onto the skirts of

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[51] NLW, MS 23357B, p.236.
[52] Fraiberg et al.,'Ghosts in the nursery: a psychoanalytic approach to impaired mother-infant relationships', in *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychology* 14, (1975), pp. 387-8.
[53] Holmes, p.74.
[54] Elaine Scarry, *Resisting Representation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.52-5.

the village girls and Fitzpiers' blood stains the same gate later in the novel. In *The Wooden Doctor* Arabella tries to embody herself by leaving her mark on others.

The first of Arabella's attempts to validate herself by inscribing others comes when she is leaving the doctor; she is desperate that he should not forget her,

> 'Goodbye, Wooden Doctor.'
> 'Goodbye, Arabella.'
> I stretched out my arm and drew a cross above his heart. He neither started nor recoiled.
> 'Arabella, her mark' (p.108).

The second example is when she bites Oliver's hand. At their first meeting, Arabella notes his physical perfection: he would make a fine artist's model, but he claims that he does not find her attractive. However, what Arabella refers to as a 'seething restless attraction' develops between them, disturbing her mind (p.161). For Arabella this is strongly physical: 'I was forced to admit I had pictured myself in his arms, and that the bare thought had made me shiver with pleasure and poignant tenderness. I distrusted my powers of resistance – indeed, I no longer wanted to resist' (p.162). Even as she becomes conscious of these thoughts she experiences what she calls 'a bitter regret, for the Irishman'. And this makes her 'callous'. She has already lost part of her body, her heart belongs to the Irishman, and so she will follow her instinct and exert her power over Oliver so that he has to admit that he is attracted to her. She feels 'a biting contempt' for herself and her 'undertaking' (p.162). Following her resolution the mood between them is disputatious: Oliver says she is 'obstinate, self-opinionated and stupid'. Her 'self-esteem is colossal,' she has 'a diseased ego' (p.164). She applauds his cruelty but experiences a feeling of lifelessness in her body. The next evening Arabella feels sullen and resentful; she refuses to join in a game of cards which culminates in some horse play between Oliver and the daughters of the farmer, Megan and Gwynneth. He lifts them up and puts them in the bacon rack where they sit swinging their legs and urging him to lift Miss Warden up there too. She whispers, 'You dare' (p.165).

Responding to this challenge, what follows amounts to a fight between Oliver and Arabella, an expression of their mutual physical attraction as well as the power struggle between them. It seems likely that Arabella's early experiences have led her to conflate the expression of sexual feelings with violence. He stoops to lift her and she hits him hard on the jaw, then, 'He squeezed me to his chest, a fiery current ran through our veins. Enraged, I could have killed him...I did what I thought to be outrageous even then: with a ferocious snap I bit Oliver's hand' (p.166). Everyone is shocked. Arabella is not ashamed, but feels sick; her throat contracts with passion.

The incident acts as a catalyst for their sexual union: when he returns from having his hand bandaged, the hand that she now wishes to clasp and caress, to put to her breast and cherish, she apologises to him and 'Bending he grasped me by the shoulders; I turned my head, and set my lips to the bandaged hand. He snatched me to him, dragged my head back and kissed me insatiably' (p.167). They spend the rest of the night together and Oliver proposes marriage. She wants to accept, but back in her room undressing she looks at herself in a mirror expecting to see a change in her face, 'I fancied it was there. Dry, white lips and circled eyes, tangled, matted hair...

"Empty," I said to Arabella' (p.169).

Lacan's metaphorical use of the mirror to describe his perception of the way the young infant first begins to have a sense of itself as a coherent, integrated being is useful here. The baby only arrives at some sense of 'I' by finding an 'I' reflected back by something outside itself[55]. Looking in the mirror has only served to emphasize Arabella's fragmented sense of self. She addresses her reflection as if it belongs to a separate entity. In her intensely physical encounters with Oliver: by biting him 'almost to the bone' (p.170), and then sleeping with him, she seeks to establish a sense of her

[55] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, a selection translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (First pub. Éditions du Seuil, 1966; first translation, Tavistock, 1977; repr. London: Routledge, 1997), pp.1-7.

corporeal reality, but the opposite happens. Her limbs seem 'to melt and dissolve in his arms' (p.170) and when she looks in the mirror her reflection is empty. Haunted by her doctor, she has become ghostly.

Later, when Oliver is fishing, she recalls the story that a month before, a woman had climbed an alder on the bank and from there flung herself into the pool and drowned. 'They had discovered the marks of her feet on the bark, and the twigs bent and broken as though she had clutched at them in falling' (p.170). She looks at Oliver's bandaged hand and reflects that '...he would probably wear the scar much longer than he would remember me by any other token' (p.170). Just as the woman has allowed a narrative of her drowning to be constructed from the signs of her embodied passage through the environment - her footsteps and the bent and broken twigs - so Arabella, by leaving her mark on both the doctor and Oliver attempts to embody herself, but her sense of herself remains elusive. Her discovery is that her identity does not depend on the body, but on words. She can only make her mark on the world through the creation of her book.

Writing and the book

Randall Stevenson observes of Modernist fiction that it is characterised by 'self-consciousness and a habit of self-portraiture' which 'extend into a kind of self-reflexiveness in which texts talk about their own methods, or artist-characters discuss or demonstrate problems and priorities which also figure in the construction of the novel in which they appear'[56]. In common with other, more canonical, Modernist texts, the subject of *The Wooden Doctor* is its own production. The heroine, Arabella, is, like her creator, a writer, and she talks about the process of writing the novel in which she

[56] Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (London and New York: Prentice Hall, 1998), p.169.

appears. The first time she does this explicitly is just before she chronicles the period of her life in which she suffered intense misery, brought on by the doctor's rejection of her love:

> I cannot write about it now without trembling; yet I am urged to do it. It is very difficult and must be done with the utmost simplicity or I shall turn aside to darkness where lucidity is hopelessly lost in the incoherent exploration of sensations (p.110).

Writing causes a physical tremor, but more importantly it rescues her from darkness dominated by incoherent sensation. The words Evans gives to her alter ego here echo the Lacanian idea that language 'serves to cover the nakedness of painful experience with its rational linguistic clothes'[57]. This link between language and the body is established at the beginning of the novel when Arabella's response to noticing the faint curves of flesh as her body develops is to 'read more and faster' (p.7), as if by immersing herself in words she can postpone or avoid entirely the transition to womanhood which awaits her.

According to Lacan, when the very young child's illusion of continuing oneness with the mother is shattered, it is then repressed in the unconscious which is created at the same time as a repository for the desire for the mother which cannot be acknowledged in conscious thought. Desire then acts as a catalyst for the conscious search for knowledge and truth which characterises language and reason. For Lacan, the entry into language, the intellectual mastery of unbearable emotion, stemming originally from desire for the mother, is the condition of sanity. Lacan suggests that language and the unconscious are similarly constructed, consisting of signifiers which bestow meaning in the absence of the objects to which they refer. Signifiers can, however, have multiple signifieds with the result that, although language seems to represent certainty and coherence, it is in fact constantly shifting, destabilised also by the unconscious

[57] Minsky, (1996), p.154.

which acts to subvert intended meanings and rationality[58]. Terry Eagleton compares Lacan's idea of the unconscious to a 'sliding of the signified beneath the signifier' where meaning constantly fades and evaporates to a 'bizarre Modernist text which is almost unreadable and which will certainly never yield up its final secrets to interpretation'[59]. In *The Wooden Doctor* we have just such a text, one that will never yield up its final secrets.

Evans's text is concerned with her heroine's attempts to take refuge in language as a protection from unbearable emotion. There is evidence in Evans's journals to support the view that this reflects her own practice. In journal entries for June 1934, when she is in the throes of her affair with Ruth Farr, she writes, significantly addressing herself as 'Arabella', 'I wanted to die. Arabella stop. You are probing an abyss'[60]. And the following day, 'I must keep up this book or the last vague control will be gone'[61]. Similarly, Arabella describes her manuscript as 'a refuge from thought, a cure for nostalgia' (p.133).

Despite the ability of words to order and control emotion, there are times when feelings are so powerful that language loses its efficacy. For example, Oliver provokes such strong sensations of uneasiness, happiness and excitement in Arabella that her ability to take refuge in her writing is lost. One night they sit up taunting one another until at 1.30 a.m. Arabella flags, overcome with tension and fatigue:

> ...there was hardly more life in my limbs than in the furry ashes. My skin felt tight over my cheekbones, my eyes felt enormous. I could have slept forever. I thought: 'I must write.' I said it. The words were my last effort (p.164).

As Arabella feels her body descend into a death-like inertia, her last energy is spent on words expressing her will to write.

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[58] Lacan, *Écrits,* pp.146-175.
[59] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.146.
[60] NLW, MS 23366D, p.212/72.
[61] NLW, MS 23366D, p.213/72.

The disturbing episode which culminates in Arabella biting Oliver's hand happens the following day. Left alone, Arabella brings out her manuscript, but it is no good, she cannot escape into it, she cannot write: 'The words were stale, stupid. They had not wiped away the blood...impossible to work with those round, bright spots before me' (p.166). She tries to clean up the blood then sits and takes up her pen again, but cannot complete a sentence. Oliver returns and she longs to touch the hand she has wounded, 'I would have spoken: the discovery that I could not control my feeling for him made it impossible' (p.167). In the grip of powerful emotion words literally fail her.

In her journal for March 1933, Evans makes a similar connection when writing of her desire for an all-consuming passion:

> I shall <u>try</u> to stop from playing with pebbles on the shore; I shall try to plunge into the heart of that clean lake, passion, not to explore with bungling fingers, the tiny breakers. I shall feel the waters all around me, over my head, so that perhaps I cannot speak one word[62].

Passion, like pain, defeats, prevents linguistic expression. When it is over she can again take up the pen, 'I am no longer a sack of <u>amorous</u> and <u>loose</u> <u>sensations</u>. Day and night I think of writing' (April 17th 1934)[63]. An observation by Roland Barthes is illuminating here[64]. Barthes refers to the 'sensual delight' of the 'simultaneous use of speech and the kiss: to speak while kissing, to kiss while speaking', while realising that this delight is imaginary: each action excludes the other.

The abrupt change of heart with which the novel ends is described tersely in a few short sentences, amounting to a scant page of text, introduced by the observation:

> Shall I write any more?
> Yes, though it is difficult.

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[62] NLW, MS 23366D, p.141/4.
[63] Ibid. p.174/45.
[64] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* pp.140-1, cited in Daniel Gunn, *Psychoanalysis and Fiction: An Exploration of Literary and Psychoanalytic Borders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.56.

> Difficult because I cannot understand myself: difficult because the longest, slowest thoughts run to no more than a very, very few bare words (p.176).

In the space of two hundred and fifty words, Arabella describes how the confidence that she was cured of her obsession with the doctor dissipates as soon as she meets him, and she becomes instantly convinced that she cannot marry another man. Another element is introduced here: the relationship between thoughts and words: the thoughts have been difficult, long and slow, but the resulting words are few.

The relationship between language, thought and emotion is a complex one and a theme which continues to preoccupy Evans in her writing, as she tries to find a way of bringing language and thought together. Evans's difficulties can be explained by adopting the Lacanian view that language is slippery and subject to unconscious drives which destabilise and subvert intended meanings. However, the repetition of key words or phrases may offer a clue as to what lies beneath the surface of the narrative. In *The Wooden Doctor* there are striking examples of repeated images which allow the reader insights into the 'unconscious' of the text. An example of this involves the colour red.

In *A Ray of Darkness*, Evans describes the inner conflict she feels between being a mother and being an artist, fearing the two roles to be mutually exclusive. In the heroine of this early novel, we see the first intimation of her creator's reluctance to enter the 'reproductive reality' of adulthood[65]. Grosz points out that menstruation is associated with 'blood, with injury and the wound'. It seems likely that the repeated references to the colour red in the novel are associated with this, especially as 'red' is frequently linked to blood and pain. When Arabella describes the aftermath of the tests carried out to investigate her illness she describes her agony:

> Sensation was so concentrated into one part of me that it ceased in every other; the ward spun round me, my body as the axle of that red wheel of pain, and to the axle like the deep heart in a whirlpool, there was an unutterable centre (p.98).

[65] Grosz, p.205.

And, 'The four red hours after the test had taught me what an instrument of torture the human body can be' (p.99). The tests, aimed at tracking the source of the problem, have involved pouring water into her body through a funnel until she could stand no more. Her body is agonised at its very centre, in the region of her womb, and the agony for her is coloured red. Arabella's detachment from her own body is also notable. Her sense that she is being tortured by her own body indicates a perceived split between body and mind, a dichotomy which will recur in the later work, especially *A Ray of Darkness.*

The colour red or scarlet is also often found in descriptions of flowers. There are red chrysanthemums (p.89), scarlet carnations (p.94), red chestnut (p.121), crimson tulips (p.121) and poppies (p.161). A hint of the significance of flowers comes when Arabella looks back on the spring when her obsession with the doctor was at its height and causing her the most intense misery, 'I remembered the spring, the flowers, the rapture, the turbulent virgin passion' (p.162).

Flowers are associated with 'turbulent virgin passion', with 'deflowering', the red suggestive of the broken hymen which, for Arabella, may have happened through surgical intervention during the investigation into her illness. When she recovers consciousness she discovers that she is bleeding: 'I understood then what they had done' (p.80).

Bright red flowers are also linked to vibrancy and passion. We learn that the doctor loved flowers, but when Arabella, rejected by him, goes to the Welsh farm where she meets Oliver, the flowers there are artificial red sweet peas (p.141). The passion she feels for Oliver also turns out to be artificial, even though she sleeps with him. It is fitting, therefore, that we learn that after she breaks off their engagement he sends her red tulips on her birthday (p.177).

Both literature and psychotherapy open possibilities for creativity because both involve the construction of a narrative in which powerful, perhaps disturbing, needs or desires can be expressed. For both Evans and her creation, Arabella, the writer in the text, writing the autobiographical novel becomes a form of therapy. In this respect comparisons can be made with both Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Virginia Woolf. Gilman wrote her short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), as a protest against the enforced rest cure which she felt was stifling her creativity. Her heroine's hallucinations only begin when she is forbidden to write. Diane Price Herndl suggests that the story was Gilman's 'writing cure,' for 'in creating a narrative of her hysterical condition, she no longer had to embody illness directly but could represent it in her text'[66].

Gilman uses her writing to project her suffering on to her heroine; in the case of Virginia Woolf it has been argued that she used her writing to work through the traumas she suffered while growing up, particularly the experience of abuse by her half brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth. Elaine Showalter asserts that, 'Writing, in fact, was Woolf's form of therapy,' and she quotes Louise DeSalvo's 1989 biography, 'Through language, through her diary, Virginia rebuilt her life, rebuilt her psyche'[67]. It seems likely that Evans, through her autobiographical novel, was working through a real or metaphorical experience of abuse and the humiliation she had felt when her love for the doctor was rejected. In February 1933, Evans sent a proof copy of *The Wooden Doctor* to Dr Dunlop. When he failed to even acknowledge receipt of her book, she wrote, 'Eh bien, if it's a good book, all that was worth it' (Feb. 27th 1933)[68]. And the following month when she imagines friends, 'a rabble crew,' laughing over the pages of her book she says it wounds her pride but she seems to accept it, 'Thus my long love and my

[66] Diane Price Herndl, 'The Writing Cure', *NWSA* Journal, 1 (1988), p.74.
[67] Showalter, p.89.
[68] NLW, MS 23366D, p.140/3.

Irishman'[69]. Writing her story has enabled her to come to terms with her disappointment and humiliation, because it has produced a book; it has helped her to fulfil her wish to be a writer.

Evans's perception that her life experience and suffering is of less significance than the work of art it has produced is a Modernist commonplace and accords with ideas expressed by Lawrence and Proust. For example, Gudrun's conclusions about art in *Women in Love,* 'Art and Life were to them the Reality and Unreality. "Of course," said Gudrun, "life doesn't *really* matter – it's one's art which is central"'[70]. That Evans was familiar with Lawrence's writing is clear from her journals (17th March and 17th June 1934)[71]. Similarly, for Proust, 'Real life, life at last laid bare and illuminated – the only life which in consequence can be said to be really lived – is literature'[72].

Daniel Gunn suggests that in writing, as in therapy, the writer/patient's words are always addressed to an other[73]. Writing, like a message in a bottle, is always on a trajectory. It might be met with silence, the therapist is often silent, but it is a silence in which meanings repressed by the patient may become audible. In the same way, meanings may become clear as the silent reader reads. Evans, however, in her text tries to manage the silence by imagining the reader's response, and by inserting herself into the silence. 'Arabella' intrudes into her own text, in passages reminiscent of some in the journals where Evans addresses herself as Arabella: 'You're not thinking Arabella, you're hysterical and wasting paper' (June 20th 1934)[74]. Significantly, this reprimand is caused by Evans feeling that she was losing control of her writing, wasting paper by filling it with too many emotional words. In the novel, Arabella also reprimands herself:

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[69] Ibid. p.142/5.
[70] D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love,* (First pub. 1921; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.504.
[71] NLW, MS 23366D, p.168/26; p.208/69.
[72] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* vol. III, trans. S. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (First pub. 1913-27; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.931.
[73] Gunn, p.218.
[74] NLW, MS 23366D, p.213/73.

> I could not attract the man I loved: henceforth I should walk in utter humiliation...I look at those words now that I have written them down, admitting their truth. Arabella, from the heights of folly and the depths of despair I trounce you, denounce you, curse you, flout you for a fool (p.122).

The humiliation is made real by writing it down and the reader is invited to join Arabella in her condemnation of herself, but Arabella's humiliation is tempered by the fact that she can write for others to read.

On the second occasion Arabella intrudes into her text, she actually provides the reader's response. The passage concerns a conversation with her publisher. At first, it seems as if the novel referred to is Evans's own first novel, *Country Dance*, because she talks about the manuscript supposedly found in a cottage which is the device used in *Country Dance.* However, she continues:

> 'This Arabella,' exclaims the befogged reader, 'how she does indulge herself in mental meanderings! I want a story, I want a hero, not a middle-aged doctor...I want a pure, pretty and pursued heroine.' Good person, I am writing a story of humiliation and loss. It is for me: it is mine (p.133).

This clearly refers to *The Wooden Doctor.* The conflations and confusions, *The Wooden Doctor/Country Dance*, Arabella/Margiad/Peggy, are secondary to the statement 'It is for me. It is mine.' When feeling lonely and despairing, Arabella seizes a pencil and writes, 'There's no doctor.' 'There's only me' (p.82). Evans installs not only the reader, but also herself in her text; it is self reflexive, reflecting back on itself and its author as she struggles to establish herself through her words: 'There's only me.' Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the initials of her adopted name form the personal pronoun, ME.

Evans's possibly unconscious project of creating herself as a writer through her autobiographical novel links her to both Wordsworth and Joyce. As Paul Jay observes, the *Prelude* with its stated subject, 'the growth of the poet's mind', best demonstrates that in its own composition. The effect of this is at the same time to transform the

autobiographical subject himself[75]. Similarly, the subject of *The Wooden Doctor* could be said to be the birth of a writer of which the novel itself is proof. There are even closer parallels between Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Wooden Doctor*. According to Jay, 'Joyce seeks to dramatize the truth about his past by means of a fictional reconstruction rather than in and by an ostensibly historical recollection whose objectivity would be unavoidably compromised the moment pen was put to paper'[76].

By dramatising his past, mingling fact and fiction, Joyce, Jay suggests, seeks less to chronicle the past than to overcome it[77]. I suggest that this exactly describes Evans's own project. The close links between the events in *The Wooden Doctor* and events in her own life have been traced, but it would be wrong to suggest that it is a chronological autobiographical account correct in all its details. However, by claiming it as fiction she is free to dramatise events of key significance to her and by writing about them, to overcome them. She can provide a narrative that can, through its art, transform the past which it is impossible to recapture factually. It is my contention that like Joyce in Stephen Dedalus, Evans realised that through Arabella, by writing about her growth as an artist, she could become one.

Richard Ellman, Joyce's biographer, notes his subject's perception of the parallel between artistic conception and gestation and their human equivalent and speaks of how in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Joyce could be seen as giving birth to himself, in effect becoming "his own mother"[78]. Joyce himself in *A Portrait* refers to the 'womb' of his imagination in which his experiences had to be not simply

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[75] Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.33.
[76] Jay, p.35.
[77] Jay, p.117.
[78] Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.309.

recaptured but reworked[79]. In the same way, for Evans *The Wooden Doctor* represents a double birth: of herself as writer and of her text. This is powerfully illustrated by the anthropomorphic vocabulary she employs when referring to her novel in her journal. In March 1933, the month of the novel's publication, she wrote, 'I have wrought bones, muscles, a beating heart: my book's alive and it [her obsession with the doctor] was worth it'[80].

Daniel Gunn notes how other authors have equated creation through language with the creation of a flesh and blood child. Kafka, in his *Diaries* (11 Feb. 1913, p.214), referring to reading the proofs of *The Judgement*, remarks that the story came out of him, 'like a real birth, covered with filth and slime'[81]. Annie Anzieu observes, 'Writing is a way of perpetuating oneself...something identical happens in a woman when she conceives and carries a child'[82]. Evans's adolescent passion for her doctor caused her great misery. However, although it was unrequited and unconsummated, the relationship nevertheless was fertile: its issue was Evans's text, which she addresses as she might a child, 'Oh my book, my first novel, my dear love' (March 7th 1933)[83].

The metaphorical equation of body and text is an idea expressed by both Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* and Gabriel Josopovici in *Writing and the Body*, in which he suggests that 'in the right hands', the novel 'as it is read may become a living body'[84]. Gunn also points to the significant use of the word 'corpus' to refer to the totality of a writer's output[85]. For Evans the text becomes a body, specifically her child, but also the physical body itself becomes a text, an amalgam of signifiers freighted with meaning. As the wound on Ann's body speaks for her after death in *Country Dance*, so

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[79] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (First pub. 1914-5; repr. London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p.236.
[80] NLW, MS 23366D, p.141.
[81] Kafka, Franz, *Diaries*, trans. Joseph Kresh and Martin Greenberg, ed. Max Brod (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 11th Feb. 1913, p.214.
[82] Gunn, p.224 note 25.
[83] NLW, MS 23366D, p. 141/5.
[84] Gabriel Josipovici, *Writing and the Body* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.33.
[85] Gunn, p.56.

Arabella's suffering body is central to the meaning of *The Wooden Doctor*. But at the end of her novel it is its production which is her supreme achievement, more important than humiliated love, or bodily suffering. The journal shows that Evans shared this perception. Evans's own body failed her – it sickened and it could not attract the object of her desire. In making her text stand in for her body she enacts the Lacanian idea that 'words and thinking replace rather than stand in for bodily sexuality and love...Art and poetry replace life and embodied feeling'[86].

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud described the 'fort-da' game, which came to him while watching his grandson in his pram. The child would throw an object out of the pram, exclaiming 'fort' (gone away), before dragging it back in on the end of a string, saying 'da' (here). Freud interpreted this as the infant learning to come to terms with its mother's absence. Eagleton suggests that it can also be read as 'the first glimmerings of narrative' in which an object is first lost and then recovered[87]. He argues that all narratives, even the most complex, depend for their excitement and narrative drive on the recovery of a lost object. He makes a distinction, however, between realist texts in which the reader feels confident that the lost object will be restored and Modernist texts, for example those by Beckett and Brecht, where the reader is constantly reminded that things could have happened differently or not at all. Eagleton points to the fact that the prototype of loss, according to psychoanalytical thinking, is castration and Modernist texts could be said to have accepted the reality of this: 'the ineluctability of loss, absence and difference in human life'[88].

It could be argued that the lost object in *The Wooden Doctor* is the doctor's love which Arabella desires, but which is never restored to her, creating an ending for the novel which is abrupt, almost brutal:

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[86] Rosalind Minsky (1998), p.221.
[87] Eagleton, pp.160-1.
[88] Eagleton, p.161.

All this took place some time ago.
My book was published.
Oliver sends me red tulips on my birthday.
And the Irishman married a young girl a few months after my return.

* * *

And that's the end (pp.176-7).

There is 'fort' without 'da'. Lacking the reassuring ending of a realist text, *The Wooden Doctor* is about loss and absence.

However, in the ending of Evans's novel there is also a beginning: 'My book was published.' Arabella's book and *The Wooden Doctor* fall into the category of what Edward Said has called 'beginning texts'[89]. These are narratives that are about and at the same time seek to enact the individual's search for a new beginning for the self. 'The plot of the *self's* new beginning is reflected in the artist's *textual* one'[90]. Evans's own journal illustrates her recognition that although her book is a story of loss and humiliation it is nevertheless, by its very existence, a triumphant beginning, 'I was unhappy – what of that? I have conveyed my misery – what of that? Ah a great deal. I have wrought bones, muscles, a beating heart; my book's alive and it was worth it'[91].

The intimate connection between body and book is made clear in Evans's triumphant journal entry. Her book has all the attributes of a living body: her child. In this chapter, I have shown how Evans transforms autobiographical material in *The Wooden Doctor* to create an identity for herself which cannot be threatened by the violation or suffering of her body. The book can stand in place of the body to allow her an identity predicated on its own creation, that of the author.

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[89] Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), p.45.
[90] Ibid.
[91] NLW, MS 23366D, p.141/4.

3

Turf or Stone: 'projected personalities'[1]

By the time *The Wooden Doctor* appeared in March 1933, Evans had already embarked on her next novel, *Turf or Stone*, which was published in 1934. *Creed* followed in 1936. It was as if the exhilaration of producing a 'living' book from the bones of her experiences generated a creative outpouring designed to consolidate herself as an author[2]. However, from the beginning, her new novel did not come easily. In her journal she contrasts the ease with which her pen skims across the page when she does not have to think of style or words and 'how pitifully it drags over a manuscript' (Feb. 19th 1933)[3]. Later the same month she complains that she is 'out of mood' with her book[4]; her writing is 'bloody' and 'limping' (Oct. 31st 1933)[5], and instead of consisting of 'bones, muscle and a beating heart' like *The Wooden Doctor,* it is a 'poor skeleton book' (Oct. 24th 1933)[6]. Her new book is a 'skeleton' compared to her 'replete' journal and the vital earlier novel; her writing 'limps'. This vivid anthropomorphic language demonstrates the clear link she makes between the book and the body, which consistently lies at the heart of her perception of the creative process, and remains a central theme in her later autobiographical texts.

It may be that the reason her new novel refused to live was because of her attempts to distance the plot from events in her own life; it is much less obviously autobiographical than *The Wooden Doctor*. Significantly, however, her contemporary journals are 'replete' with details of her private life, which was turbulent and at times positively chaotic. Throughout the summer of 1933 and into September she struggled

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[1] Margiad Evans, 'Byron and Emily Brontë', in *Life and Letters Today* 57, 130 (June, 1948), 204.
[2]Margiad Evans, NLW MS 23366D, p.141/4.
[3]Ibid. p.139/3.
[4]Ibid. p.140/3.
[5]Ibid. p.156/19.
[6]Ibid. p.154/17.

with her novel against the backdrop of her unhappy home until in October she gave up and removed herself to the Lough Pool Inn, deep in the countryside about three miles from Lavender Cottage. Here, distanced from her parents and siblings, she managed to finish it, although still the writing does not go smoothly; she records hitches and improbabilities in the story (July 1933)[7].

As well as not relying for its plot on events from Evans's life, *Turf or Stone* differs from the earlier novels in other important ways: in place of the first person female narrator found in her first two texts there is an omniscient narrator; and the central character, Easter Probert, is male. In the contemporary journals, Evans refers to the novel more often as just 'Easter' than as *Turf or Stone*. It seems likely that this altered perspective is an attempt, conscious or unconscious, to identify herself less closely with the novel, but despite her attempts at distance, I will show how Evans uses life experience as the raw material of her art and how in writing *Turf or Stone*, unlike the earlier novels, she attempts to position herself in a context alongside her literary heroes: Hardy, Byron and Emily Brontë.

The plot of *Turf or Stone* is a simple one: Easter Probert, a groom working for Matt Kilminster, marries Mary who is expecting his child. He proves a cruel husband and Mary finds comfort in an affair with his employer, who is married with three children, Phoebe, Rosamund and Philip. Having learned of the arrangement Matt has made with Easter to facilitate the continuation of their affair, Mary decides to separate from both her husband and her lover and applies to the court for a separation order so that she can leave with her son. The novel ends with Easter's death at the hands of a husband whom he has cuckolded. Evans's autobiographical preoccupations surface in her portrayal of the relationships between parents and children, in her treatment of sexuality and in the style and tone of her text.

[7] NLW, MS 23366D, p.146/10.

Explorations of identity

In *Country Dance* and *The Wooden Doctor* I have suggested that, in the characters of Ann and Arabella respectively, Evans projects and explores aspects of her own identity. In *Turf or Stone* this exploration continues, but instead of the focus of the projection being on the central female protagonist it is split between the characters of Phoebe, Matt and Dorothy Kilminster's elder daughter, and Easter. Suzanne Nalbantian suggests that Woolf, in *Mrs Dalloway,* projects different sides of her personality onto two characters: Clarissa, the society hostess and Septimus Warren Smith, the suicidal war veteran[8]. Similarly, in *Turf or Stone*, Evans explores different aspects of her identity: the character of Phoebe allows her to draw on her own experience as an adolescent girl, daughter of a drunken father and inadequate mother, coming to terms with her sexuality while Easter represents his creator's passion and energy, as well as her wonder at the natural world.

There is plenty of evidence in the text that Phoebe is, like Arabella, a self-portrait. Phoebe is twelve when Easter first comes to work as a groom for her father at The Gallustree, the same age as Arabella when she first encounters the wooden doctor. Her relationships with her parents and siblings echo both Arabella's and Evans's own. There is also a physical resemblance: like Evans, Phoebe is tall and bony, with a sallow complexion and a harassed expression. She is sensitive, perceptive and musically talented and significantly, like her creator, and like Arabella, she writes a diary: 'She kept a sort of diary, or rather a record of her vague, unhappy thoughts' (p.161). The voice of Phoebe's diary is very similar to the author's own: she addresses herself by name as Evans does and there are echoes of Evans's journal within Phoebe's. For example, when Phoebe wonders why she stops to write in a household where there is so

[8] Nalbantian, p.161.

much to be done, she compares herself to 'a cold potato, heavy and solid' (p.161). Here, we might detect an echo of a journal entry for June 1933 where, referring to herself as Arabella, Evans compares herself to a piece of pumice stone, grey and dry (June 15th 1934)[9]. Evans also writes in her journal of the chaotic household at Lavender Cottage and how sometimes she wishes she could get away, 'What shall I do? ...I hate living here, I'm cold and comfortless and I can't write' (September 23rd 1933)[10].

Suzanne Nalbantian suggests that the end of childhood represented a traumatic experience for Joyce and Woolf who attempt to deal with this by making it 'the artistic locale of their fiction'[11]. Evans, through the characters of Arabella and Phoebe, is engaged in the same process, working through her own difficulties at this crucial stage of her development, through her 'fictional' creations.

At the start of the novel Phoebe is fifteen; she, like Arabella and Peggy, is close to her sister and has an only brother who is also the youngest of the siblings, and spoilt. Ominously, the Kilminsters live in a dilapidated house, five miles out of Salus, at a crossroads where a gibbet once stood; a portion of its crossbeam is said to have been incorporated into the porch and the house named The Gallustree. It is not a happy place, and in this it reflects Evans's contemporary experience at Lavender Cottage. Writing in her journal in July 1933, she laments, 'This is an unhappy home'[12]; in May 1934, she describes her 'mad parents spewing noise and calamity wherever they go'[13], and in June of the same year, 'I feel a frightful, a really blasphemous contempt for parenthood'[14]. Phoebe echoes this sentiment, after a description of her parents' marriage:

> Matt, like a great many of his neighbours, frequently drank himself sick and stupid. His wife wept and reviled him at the top of her voice as they lay in bed, rising and running about the room, sometimes throwing her brushes and scent

[9] NLW, MS 23366D, p.205/67.
[10] Ibid. p.152/16.
[11] Nalbantian, p.53.
[12] NLW, MS 23366D p.146/10.
[13] NLW, MS 23366D p.180/52.
[14] Ibid. p.219/79.

> bottles at his head, or stamping her feet while she called for the children to look at their father. She would tell all her friends that it was impossible to go on – they must separate. No woman should be called upon to live with a drunkard. She confided everywhere. Then a day or two later, perhaps sooner, they would become reconciled, for they were really quite attached to each other, and everything went on in just the same old slapdash, slovenly manner. Phoebe's natural reverence for her parents suffered severely (pp.35-36).

It seems likely that such scenes were only too familiar to Evans and that they were the reason for the unhappy home from which she had to remove herself to finish her novel. Despite the wording of the novel's dedication, 'To My Father who does not resemble Matt', it is a fact that Godfrey Whistler was, like Matt, a drunk. Evans's inability to separate fatherhood from alcoholism in her fiction illustrates the impact the experience of growing up in such a household had on her. In *Turf or Stone* Matt's volatility is emphasized: the first thing we learn about him is that he leads 'an increasingly blank existence'[15]. Recently he has resorted to drink, 'tortured by the vacancy of everything'. He is described as consumed by 'ennui' (p.29) and 'drugged by inertia' (p.59) and yet, frighteningly for his wife and children, he can still be enraged and resort to physical violence, especially when the worse for drink.

Evans vividly conveys a sense of the impossibility of Phoebe's position when called to be an intermediary between her warring parents: Dorothy, her mother, frequently uses the children as both shield and weapon in her confrontations with her husband. On one occasion, waiting for her husband's return, she tries to keep her children with her, alternately scolding them and running down their father. When he does eventually come home, 'not quite drunk' she summons them together to witness their father's degradation, 'Philip, sweetheart, sit up and look at daddy. Rosamond...Phoebe, look at your father. He's drunk. He can't stand up. Isn't it horrible. Isn't it disgusting?' (p.83). This recalls a similar incident in *The Wooden*

[15] Margiad Evans, *Turf or Stone* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1934), p.25.
Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Doctor in which Arabella's mother cries out to her daughter, 'See the horrors of a drunken man'[16]. The narrator, Arabella, her creator's alter ego, remarks, 'I looked for all my life'. The truth of this is evidenced by the fact that in all four of Evans's novels there are children made wretched by a parent who drinks; in her final novel, *Creed*, Menna wishes her alcoholic mother, a grotesque parody of a parent, dead.

Throughout *Turf or Stone*, Phoebe's mother is determined that her children share her domestic misery. She recalls her elder daughter from a visit to her grandmother's to help her cope with Matt and when Phoebe arrives treats her to a lengthy recitation of her grievances. This has such an effect on the sensitive girl that she is described as feeling 'pure misery' which brings her close to fainting. However, her mother shows no empathy for her daughter; she does not notice Phoebe's distress and instead complains about how dull things are and suggests an outing to Chepsford to have some fun (p.259). Mrs Kilminster has a taste for luxury and diversion in contrast to her serious daughter: she spends 'a great deal of money on clothes, cinemas, cars or any other luxury which appealed to her at the moment' (p.43), in contrast to her daughter who 'suffers agonies from a nervous temperament' and is serious, pious and has a very grave demeanour (p.35).

During 1933-34, Evans's journal describes Lavender Cottage as a place of conflict where strong emotions between father, mother, friends and siblings ebb and flow. Rooms are 'full of emotion, anger, love, contempt' (April 17th 1934)[17]. And 'All is confusion and desperate muddle. Outside the wind blows drearily, inside gusts of madness, terror and grotesque laughter go echoing through the rooms and up and down the stairs and passage (May 14th 1934)[18]. Her mother repeatedly leaves and returns, on

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[16] Margiad Evans, *The Wooden Doctor* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1933; repr. Dinas Powys: Honno, 2005), p.16.
Further references to the Honno edition are given after quotations in the text.
[17] NLW, MS 23366D, p.174/45.
[18] Ibid. p.181/54.

one occasion 'walking down the path with a flower in her hand and a white fur hanging over her shoulder (May 12th 1934)[19]. It seems that Mrs Whistler, like Dorothy Kilminster, had a taste for luxury.

A further similarity between Evans's mother and Phoebe's is that both of them have one son, the baby of the family and their mothers' darling. There are relatively few references in Evans's journals to her brother, Roger, seven years her junior. However, in 1947 she wrote, 'Mother says Roger her only child who has got on' (Nov. 27th)[20]. This in spite of the fact that Evans had, by this time, published four novels and *Autobiography*, all of which had met with some critical and commercial success. The tempestuous relationship between Mrs Whistler and her daughters is extensively chronicled in the journals so it is tempting to conclude that the portrayal of Dorothy's partiality for her son owes something to Evans's observation of her mother's relationship with her youngest child and only son.

In *Turf or Stone,* Philip Kilminster is nearly six, 'a little boy with a white subtle face and black eyes' (p.57). The description implies a child old beyond his years; his mother adores him. We are told that Dorothy has 'two inseparable companions: her son, and her own mirrored face. She could not rest long away from either' (p.58). The structure of this sentence suggests that her relationship with her son is narcissistic: in him she sees a mirrored reflection of herself. Winnicott's description of the 'good enough mother' is relevant here; he suggests that a good enough mother is one who is able to provide a mirror for her child so that he can explore his own feelings and capabilities in a holding environment. If the mother is not psychologically strong enough to provide this responsiveness, the child will sense this and develop a 'false' self based on attempts to anticipate and meet the mother's needs for affirmation and

[19] Ibid. p.179/52.
[20] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS (GB0210) Facs 870.

holding[21]. In the case of Dorothy and Philip, the mother depends on her child for her sense of identity; she validates herself through her son, in a perversion of the healthy mother/child relationship. This impression is reinforced by the numerous occasions where the two are described as being physically close. The first time the child appears he is naked; he brings his clothes to his mother so she can dress him. She takes him on her knee 'with a long tender smile' and her husband watching sees them as 'a pretty self-indulgent couple' (p.57). His face is 'subtle' and while on his mother's knee he lights a cigarette for her and sips her coffee. These actions hint at the inappropriate, symbiotic nature of the relationship. When they are upset, mother and son 'sat on the bed together in a bundle, crying and gripping each other round the neck' (p.82). The portrait of Philip shows a boy who combines childishness with a curious adult 'knowingness'; he seems precociously aware of his power over his mother and that this in part derives from her contempt for Matt. After Dorothy has been lamenting her marriage to a drunken husband, 'She gathered Philip into her arms and kissed him wildly under the ear. He stared at Matt, subtly, laughing' (p.84).

Later in the novel, Philip is playing with his mother's pearl necklace as he sits at her feet in the summer-house. He unclasps them and winds them 'twice round her bare ankle above the strap of her thin sandal' and in doing so breaks the clasp. Instead of confessing he looks at her 'slyly' and the pearls are left on the floor as mother and son go down to the river to join his sisters who are bathing. Philip stays in the water until he turns blue and his mother drags him out, then 'She dried him on his sisters' towels, gently butting her face into his thin body, hiding it in the folds. "Eat you...eat you...with a big wooden spoon." He grasped her hair. "Mammy your pearls are broken"' (p.166). The sensuous intimacy between mother and son is striking, as is

[21] D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1971), pp.149-160.

Philip's knowing manipulation of his mother who instantly forgives him for breaking her pearls.

In contrast, Phoebe's relationship with her mother is distant. She feels she ought to please her, but Dorothy is only interested in Phoebe as support in managing her husband. When Phoebe attempts to show affection, her mother smiles 'absently': 'There was very little spontaneous affection between them now' (p.258). In her journal entry for August 14th 1933 Evans writes, 'It's sad to think that mother and N[ancy] and I have come to such a pass', and she speaks of feeling furious resentment towards her mother[22]. Clearly, Evans was working through her complex feelings about her mother in the character of Phoebe, but other characters, notably the central male character, Easter Probert, also illustrate the consequences of inadequate mothering.

While Evans was writing her novel, Easter was the character who dominated her imagination: in April 1933 she writes in her journal, 'I am obsessed, almost possessed by the strange character of Easter in my new book' (April 11th 1933)[23]. Elaine Showalter has argued that powerful heroes created by women, Heathcliff, for example, are not so much female authors' ideal lovers as their projected egos searching for a power and freedom denied them by society[24]. Following on from this Stevie Davies asserts, 'The artistic creation of a 'male' by a woman may well result in the creation of a being of whom the artist might say, "he's more myself than I am"'[25], as Cathy says of Heathcliff[26]. Evans asserts in her Journal, 'Oh Easter you shall live, I'll breath my own force into you' (April 11th 1933)[27]. Like Cathy, Evans seems to be indicating her perception that she is Easter; that in some sense Easter will embody her own life force.

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[22] NLW, MS 23366D, p.148/12.
[23] NLW, MS 23366D, p.144/7.
[24] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (First pub. 1977; repr. London: Virago, 1995), p.136.
[25] Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), p.198.
[26] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (First pub. 1847; repr. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003), p.63.
[27] NLW, MS 23366D, p.144/8.

Easter is passionate and vital, but he is also cruel and vindictive when his need for unconditional love is thwarted. Perhaps in her novel's protagonist Evans was exploring violent emotions felt, but repressed, surfacing only in her journals. In *Turf or Stone,* Easter's need for love comes closest to being met by the novelist's second alter ego, Phoebe, herself inadequately mothered. In view of what we know from the journals of Evans's bisexuality, I suggest that both Easter and Phoebe can be read as aspects of herself. In February 1933 while she was struggling to write *Turf or Stone*, a journal entry reads, 'When, or where shall Peggy find *vitality* to equal her own....Oh that I had been a man, I'd have taught them' (Feb. 16th 1933; my italics)[28].

In the previous chapter, I suggested that Arabella/Peggy's attraction to other women could be interpreted as a search for a mother substitute to fulfil desires that have so far gone unsatisfied. In this novel, Evans's treatment of Easter's troubled relationships with women lends itself to a similar interpretation. Significantly, the first mention of Easter's mother comes on his wedding night when he returns home to find his wife asleep. When he touches her clothes folded on the chair; the feel of the silk brings back a vivid memory from twenty-five years ago: he recalls in minute detail helping his mother hang similar garments out to dry. The link is made in his consciousness between his mother and his wife, Mary, who shares her name with the Virgin, the paradigm of perfect motherhood.

Easter's problem with women is apparent in his first interaction with Mary after the wedding. We are told that Easter 'loved women who were sad and gentle, and suffered him' (p.16). The word 'suffered' to mean allow, recalls the words of Jesus, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me...' (St Matthew 19.14). Easter approaches Mary in this spirit, putting his open hand on her side in a gesture of supplication, with the words, 'Let's go home, Mary' (p.16), but when she responds by pushing him away

[28] NLW, MS 23366D, p.138/2.

and evading his kiss, he is instantly enraged, 'He pinched her arm, wrenching at her clothes in spite, and gave her a rough shove which caused her to stumble' (p.17).

This pattern is repeated; he wants her to be tender to him, to soothe and caress him, but when she resists his instinct is to hurt her because she has thwarted him. When Mary does submit to him he is swamped by 'voluptuous tenderness' and softly moves his head between her breasts as a baby might, and, we are told, 'A gentle timid woman he might have loved with real intensity, and perhaps even constancy, since his promiscuous rovings were something in the nature of a search' (p.79).

From the details of Easter's childhood, which are introduced as a series of reveries, we learn that his early years were spent with his gypsy mother, working in the fields. The winter when Easter is four they share lodgings with a young couple, the Fitzgeralds; Easter's first intimations of sexuality come to him via Mrs Fitzgerald, the other mother figure in his life. In contrast to his mother, who is described as small and sinewy with a rather manly face, Mrs Fitzgerald is 'a handsome, wild girl' of sixteen (p.94) who lets the child help her make pegs, in return hanging her necklaces round his neck. The necklace secures a bond between the child and the young woman and he remembers the weight of her heavy jewellery on his neck into adulthood. These necklaces recall the pearls which young Philip binds around his mother's bare ankle and are freighted with sexual significance. They literally bind together the pre-pubescent boy and the sexually mature woman represented by her sophisticated jewels, highlighting the inappropriate nature of the relationship. The women with whom Easter becomes involved as an adult often wear cheap, glittery jewellery; it symbolises his quest. The young Easter is enthralled by Mrs Fitzgerald and her image is seared into his imagination after an occasion when he follows her and encounters her naked, a memory that 'became fearfully vivid as he grew older' (p.97).

When Easter is in his early teens, his mother dies of a 'bleeding cancer' in Chepsford Poor Law infirmary. Cancer links Easter's mother and Evans's own; as I have already noted, there is a reference in the journals to her mother's 'lopped and bitter bosom', possibly a mastectomy scar. The powerful motif of the poisonous breast continues into the final novel, *Creed*, in which Florence Dollbright dies of breast cancer, giving thanks that, being childless, she has at least the comfort of knowing that she cannot pass the disease on.

A vulnerable, motherless adolescent, Easter again encounters Mrs Fitzgerald; they work at pea picking together. She seduces him and he cannot get on with his work, mesmerised by the sight of her tearing off the pods, 'while her long necklace swung as she stooped' (p.102), a reminder of his closeness to her as a boy. Mrs Fitzgerald goads and indulges Easter's love for her, and the two carry on an affair behind her husband's back, until provoked by the sight of his wife kissing and caressing Easter, Mr Fitzgerald attacks him, kicking him in the face:

> So it ended, his loving. Mrs Fitzgerald had haunted his childhood with her nakedness, and she haunted his manhood also...he lusted after women from this time onwards, but his lonely abandoned spirit dwelt in a wilderness where as yet none had ever penetrated (p.104).

With the end of this affair, his loving is replaced by lusting after women, searching for someone who will 'suffer' him like a mother and so rescue him from the 'wilderness'.

When his wife Mary fails to provide the gentle, mothering love he craves, he embarks on a series of affairs, characterised by cruelty and violence on his part when his search for succour is denied or thwarted. Some women are drawn to him by his neediness: after Easter is thrown outside after a drunken brawl in the pub, Ivy, the publican's wife, feels 'something resembling tenderness' towards him (p.146), while Ann Vey is so fond of Easter that she braves her tyrannical father's wrath to continue their affair. She perhaps comes closest to resembling the mother substitute he seeks. She

is described as being the least attractive of the women he gets involved with, 'being undergrown and slightly crooked' (p.201). This echoes the earlier description of his mother as 'small and sinewy' with a 'manly' face (p.93), but the 'delicacy and docility' Ann displays towards him endears her to him and he is 'never quite so rough with her as with the others' (p.201).

Evans's treatment of Easter's relationships with women can be illuminated by Freudian theory, in particular his description of the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, all children fall in love with their mothers and the Oedipus crisis, the moment when the child has to give this up in order to become an autonomous, gendered individual, is precipitated by the entry of a third person who represents the external world, culture and the law[29]. The task for a boy is to separate himself from his mother and to give her up as his first love-object. This is a double loss, which can have effects into adulthood: a common coping strategy for loss is to denigrate the lost object. In certain extreme cases this results in misogyny and violence against women. The boy must give up the emotional, bodily world of the feminine and identify instead with his father. This is brought about by his fear of castration at the hands of his father because he perceives himself as his father's rival. If this does not happen, Freud argues that the boy will continue to be dominated by phantasy involving possession of the mother and castration anxiety which will inhibit his ability to cope with the demands of reality and relationships[30]. Easter's cruelty to women and his desperate search for a lover who will also mother him can be read in this light, especially as a father figure with whom he could identify has been lacking. Evans summarises his situation, 'He disliked men, and longed in the bottom of his heart for a woman's tenderness' (p.104).

[29] Sigmund Freud, *SE* XIX, *The Ego and the Id and Other Works* (1923-25), pp.248-252.
[30] Minsky, (1998), p.29.

Evans's preoccupation with the link between a child's experience of inadequate parenting and its effect on adult sexual relationships is further nuanced by the relationship which develops between the adolescent Phoebe and her father's groom; the two characters who, I suggest, represent different aspects of their creator's identity. As I've already noted, Evans recorded being 'obsessed' and 'possessed' by Easter in her journal; she transfers this obsession onto Phoebe who, like Evans, uses her diary to confess the effect Easter has on her, 'I'm haunted...Yes, I'm haunted. Else why should strangers look at me with Easter's eyes? I do feel strange when he looks at me, so that I have to shut my eyes and feel my heart beating' (pp.161-2). The concepts of possession and haunting are very close, indicating that the subject has been overwhelmed or altered by something external to itself. Phoebe is so ashamed of her response to Easter that it even affects her response to flowers which have been put in her room: she feels that she does not deserve them as they are sweet, pure and young, 'as if they belonged to God'. Easter's haunting gaze has elicited a physical response from Phoebe, has transformed the adolescent girl from a child who is sweet and pure and innocent, to a sexual being. Significantly, Phoebe, like Arabella, mirrors her creator's experience in becoming aware of her body's sexual potential through its response to a man old enough to be her father.

Phoebe is aware that her feelings for Easter are inappropriate, because he is older, married and she has experienced first hand his violent and cruel nature: as a twelve year old she had seen him torturing kittens. Easter's extreme psychopathology is another echo of Heathcliff who boasts of hanging Isabella's little dog[31]. Easter, also, while at first seeming kindly, subjected Phoebe to a terrifying experience by goading a pony she was riding to gallop out of control, his motive being just to see if she was afraid (p.50). He seems aroused by her fear and she flees, however 'When she thought

[31]Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p.118.

about him she felt self-conscious, and a pang went through her as though he had touched her' (p.50). Phoebe's confused and ambivalent feelings for Easter mean that 'he occupied a place by himself in her mind, a troubled corner where his dark image stirred restlessly, threateningly' (p.49).

Just as Evans was correcting the proofs of *Turf or Stone* in February 1934, Ruth Farr, entered her life bringing 'passionate clouds of perverted love' (April 9th 1934)[32]. As Evans charts the progress of her intensely physical relationship with Ruth in her journal, many passages are obscured, painted over with black ink. I suggest that these gaps in the text of her life are more telling than the words they erase and that they equate to the troubled corner of Phoebe's mind where the dark image of perverted love, which both threatens and seduces, stirs.

Although she is young enough to be his daughter, there are indications in the text that Easter associates Phoebe with his mother, and it can be inferred that this is what makes her attractive to him. On one occasion, he has a strange dream in which he reverts to early childhood when he lived with his mother in a sort of gypsy encampment. In his dream he calls out for his mother, but when it is not his mother's hand he sees, he cries out, '"Who's there?" "Phoebe," her voice replied as distinctly as if she had really spoken in his ear' (p.73). At the end of the novel, as Phoebe pleads with Easter not to reveal before the court that her father has been Mary's lover, we learn that Easter '...desired Phoebe ardently, had done for a long time, almost unaware...He experienced once more the voluptuous and painful craving for unsought caresses' (p.273), maternal caresses, perhaps, the lack of which sap his manhood and cause 'wild outbreaks of unconscious weeping at night' (p.273).

Easter's search for unconditional, voluntary love such as that demonstrated by a mother for her son persists through the novel because his wife, Mary, fails to answer his

[32] NLW, MS 23366D, p.171/43.

need. It is an irony that Mary only enters into this disastrous marriage because she is pregnant by Easter. As a mother, she is a curious mixture of the distant and devoted. Her son, Shannon, is born prematurely and Mary is very ill in the weeks afterwards[33]. The few descriptions of mother and baby are curiously devoid of emotion. However, the child does provide the catalyst for Mary's first abortive flight from Easter. In the description of this episode the child seems like a burden to its mother: she is constantly putting him down, first on the ground, then when she gets to her refuge, she asks to leave him on the sofa. Her detachment is contrasted with a girl who asks to pick him up. Mary agrees 'listlessly' but the girl 'held Shannon, devouring him with her glittering, short-sighted eyes' (p.180). Mary takes refuge in the 'Three Magpies' but she has not been there long, she just has Shannon at her breast for his evening feed, when she hears the sound of a horse's hooves and, looking out of the window, sees it is Matt, her lover, come to fetch her back. This causes such a 'nervous tremor of anticipation' to run through her body that 'the child rejected her and burst into a suffering wail' (p.183). The child is put down on the bed and the implication is that his mother spends the next two hours in a joyful physical reunion with her lover. Two years later Mary, having found out about the arrangement Matt has made with Easter to keep him away so that the pair can continue their affair, finally leaves, saying that she needs to get Shannon away from his father (pp.254-5). Mary's undemonstrative and ambivalent attitude to her son can be explained by her own experience of being mothered.

Mary is described as a 'charity child' who has lived as servant and companion to an eccentric old woman, Miss Tressan, for at least fifteen years. The old lady '...spoiled and petted her, dressed her expensively, even submitted to her dominance' (p.4), and expected her to stay single. They are considered to be very foolish by their neighbours;

[33] In her recollections of childhood, *The Immortal Hospital* (1957), NLW, MS 23369C, Evans records how while she was staying at her uncle's farm in 1918, a land girl became the 'askew and puzzled mother' of an illegitimate child whom she named Shannon (p.7).

Dorothy Kilminster implies that Mary is guilty of manipulating and sponging off her employer. Yet when, after her marriage, she receives a letter from Miss Tressan containing five pounds, she returns it without acknowledgement, 'To be offered the sort of sympathy that any unlucky servant might excite, from a woman who had for some years almost yielded obedience, put an exquisite edge on her resentment' (p.86). To accept this gift of money is seen by Mary as signifying a diminishment of her status in the relationship, which she cannot tolerate. When Shannon is born, Miss Tressan visits, lying across the bed and weeping she begs Mary to return and offers a home to both her and her son. The relationship with her employer is possibly the only experience Mary can remember of being mothered and, from the quotations given, the relationship seems to have been characterised by struggles for power, dependency and exploitation. In this context, and considering the circumstance of her son's conception and birth, Evans's portrayal of Mary as a mother who is distant and lacking in emotion has some psychological truth.

Evans's representation in this novel of fathers who are absent, cruel or distracted by drink and mothers who are reluctant, inadequate, emotionally attenuated, or self-centred and the impact of this on their children's adult relationships shows that Evans was continuing the practice of her earlier novels of exploring aspects of her self and her own experience through her fictional creations. Other preoccupations found in the first two novels also reappear: the significance of the body and the importance of the text.

Body and Mind

In earlier chapters I argued that the body is central to Evans's first two novels; its ability to speak without words, to convey meaning beyond conscious thought is demonstrated in both Ann and Arabella's suffering and in their sexual responses. Evans returns to these themes in *Turf or Stone,* indeed they could be seen as part of the 'master

plot' of her life. Peter Brooks, in his interpretation of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, suggests that each individual life, in its own way, repeats the 'master plot'[34]. This is mirrored in fiction, which implicitly sets out to retell events which have happened before, 'I sing of...' 'I tell of...'. Repetitions of image, character type, experience within a novel or a body of work allow the reader to make connections between different textual moments, to see the past and present as related and establishing a future that will be a recognisable part of the repeated pattern[35].

The significance of the body and its relation to the mind continues to be a theme through all Evans's novels and it is explored in the journals. In an entry for December 1937 she writes, 'My mind and body hate each other .... How shall I ever bring mind and body together?'[36]. This theme is also a key aspect of her meditations in *Autobiography* and becomes central in her pathographic writing, *A Ray of Darkness* and *The Nightingale Silenced*, which records her experience of epilepsy, the condition which arguably above all others demonstrates the traumatic consequences when the body, failing to receive coherent messages from the brain, falls into grotesque and uncontrollable contortions. In her writing about the disease she speculates that it might have been caused by a split in her personality.

In *Turf or Stone,* bodies are described both naked and adorned, they are sites of confusion, pain and betrayal; they bring little joy. The novel opens with Mary's marriage to Easter; Evans suggests that Mary's fate has been sealed because her body has betrayed her in its sexual response to Easter, with the result that she is carrying his child. Although Mary's unhappiness at the prospect of her marriage is clear, it seems that she has been a willing and equal partner in the sexual liaison which has sealed her fate. The first hint of this comes in the description of Mary's appearance, 'Her face was

[34] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp.90-112.
[35] Brooks, p.97.
[36] NLW, MS 23577C, p.161.

thin, without colour, her nose inclined to a downward curve, the nostrils nervously dilated. Her fresh lips protruded slightly, and this hint of a voluptuous pout suggesting a caress, lent her hollow countenance fascination' (p.2). The 'voluptuous pout' is an external sign of the sensual side of Mary's nature, which Easter has evidently awoken. But Mary feels sickened by her body, because it involuntarily yields to physical desire and responds to Easter's touch. The writing is sensuous and vivid:

> Her fingers encountered his hot mouth, he shut his lips over them so that she could feel the point of his teeth pressing lightly on her skin. He murmured indistinctly, the wordless mutters of extremity, and his hands touched her bosom. Instantly her passionless limbs kindled to his as though she were a joyful woman welcoming a beloved man. In disgust at herself she leapt away from him, out of the bed (p.33).

The relationship between Easter and Mary is an intensely carnal one, in which the partners attract and repel each other in equal measure and in which each partner fails to find what they are searching for. Failure to find in his wife the physical kindness he seeks prompts one of the most terrible scenes in the novel. Returning home late one night and finding Mary, now five months pregnant, sleeping he attacks her with a dead rat. In a grotesque parody of the infant she carries, he presses the rat's body into her neck, 'a little dead head snuggled hard under her chin' (p.76). The details are horrific: 'Its eyes are running, there are flies' eggs in the fur, the tail's half off,' he tells her. The account of their struggle with the 'poisonous little carcase crushed between them' is like a struggle for life itself. The elemental nature of their conflict is emphasized by the animal imagery used to describe them both. She crawls away from him crying, ' like a thrashed animal in snarling despair' and he 'yearns over her in the attitude of a murderer,' his lip writhing 'exposing the white teeth' (p.77). When she is reduced to shivering, cowering and sobbing with her face against the wall he quietens too and the scene ends with Easter swamped by 'voluptuous tenderness' sleeping with her in his arms. The text seems to offer some explanation for Easter's appalling cruelty: he has found himself bound by marriage to a woman who will resist him, when all he wants is

tenderness and compliance. When Mary either will not or cannot mother him, as he desires, Easter tortures her with a grotesque rotting baby substitute. It is only when Mary is reduced to child-like behaviour that his tenderness is reawakened. Easter is only able to relate to his wife if the dynamic between them is that of parent/child; his body is unable to express his yearning for gentle love and his frustration leads to physical violence and abuse. Mary suffers not only from the attack itself but also afterwards when she listens for a word of repentance '...among the kisses and the quivers there was no keen word of self-reproach. Exhausted, more bitter than ever, she went to sleep in Easter's arms' (p.76). Again, Mary's body behaves in a way that is not consistent with her emotions. Mary is aware of the disconnect between her body and her mind; she reports a strange sensation that has occurred since girlhood:

> Something like a telephone rings in my head, and then my neck seems to go numb, and though I always go on with what I'm doing, I haven't an idea what it is...I have walked quite a long way and come to myself and wondered how I did it, for I couldn't remember a thing (p.124).

In terms of the plot this information is entirely gratuitous, but in terms of the author's experiences of her own body it is deeply significant. In 1952, eighteen years after the publication of *Turf or Stone*, she uses almost the same words in *A Ray of Darkness*, to describe the earliest symptom of epilepsy, which she failed to recognise as such, and which she has 'not yet attempted to describe':

> I cannot recall when I was without moments of separation from my consciousness – moments when I was quite literally conscious and unconscious at the same time...I have often crossed a room, and, while not losing sight or bearings, not known *how* I crossed it (pp.38-9).

It seems likely that her own experience of these moments of separation unconsciously inspired the exploration in her novels of the relationship between body and mind which becomes central in the later autobiographical texts.

Writing in her journal in the spring of 1934, in the context of her growing fascination and involvement with Ruth Farr, Evans's ideas about the split between body

and mind are linked to gender uncertainty. She was familiar with the theories of Havelock Ellis regarding homosexuality[37]. Ellis suggested a category of 'gender inverts' to describe those individuals who appeared to have the souls and desires of men but the bodies of women. Following Ellis, Evans describes Ruth as having a female body, but a male mind (April 16th 1934)[38]. Laughing and joking with Peggy and her sister, Nancy, superficially they seem like three girls, 'But Ruth is a man' (April 17th 1934)[39]. Not only is it possible for the body to act independently of the will, but it is also possible for them to be gendered differently: for a male mind to reside in a female body.

Mary's body continues to govern her fate: pregnant, ill and cruelly treated by her husband she responds to the care and concern expressed by Matt, her husband's employer. After the premature birth of her son, Shannon, they begin an affair. The physically passionate side of Mary's nature is stressed, as her desire is shown to at least equal that of her lover:

> She felt his lips on her cheek, and desiring only to meet his mouth with her own, turned her head in a moment as violent as his advance, and her hand behind his neck, pressed his face down upon hers (p.184).

However, the end of the affair and the situation which leads to the climactic courtroom scene, where Mary petitions for a legal separation from her husband on the grounds of his cruelty, is precipitated by Mary's reaction to what she perceives as a deal done between her husband and Matt for access to her body. In order to continue the affair undisturbed, Matt arranges for Easter to spend half the week tending his horses at a farm five miles from the Gallustree. This situation lasts for two years until Easter takes his revenge by telling Mary that Matt has paid him 'two pounds a week for the lend on her' (p.274). In court Mary describes the scene: Easter told her that he had invested

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[37] Ellis, Havelock, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion,* Vol. 2 (First pub.1927; repub. (ebook) available at http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/ 13611#, 2004), pp154-203 (171).
[38] NLW, MS 23366D, p.172/44. (Accessed 21.5.2012)
[39] Ibid. p.174/45.

money in a pork butcher's shop. When Mary asks where the money had come from he explains:

> "I have not earned it, you have. But as your body is my property, the money was paid over to me for the loan of it. Your friend gave me two pounds a week for you, and I've saved it all up" (p.293).

In the end, the fact that her body has been traded between her husband and her lover in a commercial transaction gives Mary the power to leave them both, but not before giving way to passion once more. When she confronts Matt with her knowledge, 'You made a contract with him for my body – I'll never forgive you' (p.255), Matt tries to change her mind about leaving by attempting to elicit a physical response from her: he 'enfolds her'; drops his head on her breast; 'took her by force into his arms' (pp.254-5). But aware that her body might betray her again, she insists that this will not reflect an alteration in her determination to leave: 'If you take me now you won't alter my resolution by a shade, nor my opinion of you' (p.255). They step apart, but in the end it is Mary who embraces him, holding on to him so closely that he is breathless and they retire behind closed doors. Mary, once again, gives in to her body's desire: her body's responses are at variance with the course of action towards which her brain urges her, but despite this she remains adamant and proceeds with her petition to the court.

Mary is not the only female character in the book to respond to Easter's intense physicality. Phoebe, an adolescent, like Arabella, is just becoming aware of her body. Self-conscious, she is no longer comfortable to sun herself naked in the yard with her sister, Rosamond, but shame prevents her from explaining why. The sisters' invention of the Modest Marys, 'two young ladies who loved to take off their clothes, particularly in public places' (p.167), is drawn from Evans's own life as she describes similar exploits with her sister Nancy in her journals (June 13th 1934)[40]. There is tacit

[40] NLW, MS 23366D, p.204/65.

acknowledgement of the inherent contradiction in naming their exhibitionist selves 'Modest Marys'.

At this delicate stage in her development, Phoebe's reaction to Easter confuses and frightens her: his knowing stares make her feel uncomfortable (p.52). She records a physical response in her journal, 'I do feel strange when he looks at me, so that I have to shut my eyes and feel my heart beating' (pp.161-2). When Phoebe confronts Easter at the end of the book, she again feels shame under Easter's gaze, which is so strong it translates into a physical response: something sharp and acute which stirred her so deeply that she began to shake' (pp.272-3), and later the writer implies that Phoebe would have given in to Easter's carnal desires if he had approached her, as it is she struggles with her own 'rising instincts'. It seems likely that Evans's ambivalence about the female body is transferred to her text where it is shown as either potentially shameful, errant and ungovernable in the face of masculine sexual energy, or as a powerful symbol, equal to the male body in its desire for sexual fulfilment.

Evans sets up a dialectic between the female body clothed and narcissistic and the female body naked, both illustrated by Dorothy Kilminster. She is portrayed as volatile and pleasure seeking, but provoked beyond endurance by her husband's drinking and his inertia. Her frustrated sexuality finds expression in her aberrant relationship with her son, but this is not enough. When roused to fury by her husband's secret drinking, her body is expressive of her passions: 'rage shook her bodily and vented itself in violent action' (p.169). This leads to her bursting into Matt's room naked 'like a toy termagant'. Despite the fact that her nakedness serves only to rouse her husband's desire for his lover, Dorothy, stripped of her clothes, makes an arresting and powerful figure. She flies around the room searching for the bottle she is sure he has hidden. Her face is flushed so that she looked 'painted.' The precisely observed physical details of the female body recall the description of Renée Maréchal in the draft of *The*

Wooden Doctor, 'She was soft and white with a fascinating angularity about the shoulders and hips, of which one was slightly more developed than the other' (p. 170). Paradoxically, because of her body's seeming vulnerability, part of Dorothy's power lies in her vividly realised corporality.

Her nakedness is the more powerful because Dorothy is usually described clothed in brightly coloured sensuous fabrics: 'a long, amber coloured satin dress' (p.67); 'a fantastic geranium red dress' (p.82); 'green velvet pyjamas, very expensive and peculiar' (p.257). The depiction of Dorothy has similarities with that of Mrs De Kuyper in *The Wooden Doctor.* Mrs de Kuyper, wearing a close fitting black velvet dress and smelling deliciously of Adieu Sagesse, holds both her lover and her husband in thrall. She has taught Arabella everything she knows of the world. Dorothy's perfume is 'Dernier Soupir' which means a lover's last breath or sigh, appropriate for one whose husband has fallen in love with someone else. It is tempting to interpret these women, exotically clothed and perfumed, as displaying what Freud saw as women's narcissistic wound arising from penis envy. This perceived lack causes women to try and compensate for their sense of inferiority through a preoccupation with bodily adornment.

This vanity or sexualisation of the whole body allows them to compete with what they unconsciously feel is the superiority of the penis and at the same time makes them into lovable objects, worthy of the pedestal treatment many of them demand[41]. Both Dorothy Kilminster and Mrs de Kuyper are motivated by a desire to exert sexual power over men. However, Dorothy is 'thin, slender and very small' and her clothes have the effect of diminishing her: Easter 'disdains' her in her amber satin dress, 'She had no character, no strength, nothing to give or to teach' (p.67). She is the person in the

[41] Sigmund Freud, *SE* XIX, 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes' (1925), pp.241-258.

fantastic geranium red dress, a 'little talking woman' (p.82) whose expensive and peculiar green velvet pyjamas 'over-emphasize her slightness'. Dorothy is a far more powerful and effective presence unclothed.

Other female characters are shown to gain strength in their lack of adornment. The image of Mrs Fitzgerald, 'stark naked and flawless' (p.95), haunts Easter for the rest of his life but he is rendered impotent by the sight of Mary, 'trembling and half naked'. He looks at her 'bare thighs, her straight slender legs' (p.33) and no longer wants her. Mary is powerful in her nakedness and Easter senses that she is not the tender mother figure he desires.

By showing that her female characters are at their most real and potent unclothed or, as with Phoebe, dressed with no thought as to the effect, Evans illustrates that her perception accords with the Lacanian notion of the masquerade. This builds on Freud's concept of penis envy to illuminate the ways women package themselves as objects in response to the demands of male phantasy. As Rosalind Minsky explains:

> In their desire for a phallus - for the power to be a human subject – they make their whole body and being over to attracting an 'Other', through whom they think they may become potent and whole. In this masquerade...women effectively annihilate any possibility of a self of their own (my emphasis)[42].

There are several occasions where women use bodily adornment in the form of jewellery to literally bind men to them: Mrs Fitzgerald hangs her heavy necklaces around the young Easter's neck (p.102) and Dorothy and her son are bound by her pearls, but the pearls break; they are weak bonds. Evans's women assert their right to selfhood, when they set aside their adornment and achieve power in their nakedness. This fascination with the female body is part of Evans's distinctive gaze and reflects her bisexual orientation apparent in her contemporary journals.

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[42] Minsky (1996), p.162.

Evans, in this novel, unlike her earlier ones, is also interested in the male body, possibly because she was so fascinated by the character of Easter, as evidenced in her journal entry for April 11th 1933 [43]. She perceives the character as enlivened by her own life force; her close identification with her creation is illustrated by the fact that she transfers exactly the same image to Easter when describing what he is looking for in his sexual relationship with Mary, 'He wanted her tenderness, he wanted to be soothed, he longed for her to caress him, to weep, and to be his entirely, as if his own spirit animated her' (p.33). Easter wants to possess Mary entirely, but his body cannot express his need; when she is strong in her resistance of him, his only resort is to physical violence, '"No," she said inflexibly. She flung her head back, holding him off with rigid arms. Fuming and thwarted, he thrust his fingers into her long hair, and tugged at it until the tears ran out of her eyes' (p.33). When she continues to resist, his desire for her dissipates.

Easter finds it easier to relate to women who are plain, like his mother. Katya, his Russian lover, is described as 'ugly beautiful' (p.196) and Ann Vey is physically the least attractive of his women, but it is her 'delicacy and docility' (p.201) which appeal to him. The description of Phoebe bears a striking resemblance to Evans's assessment of her own appearance in the journals, which is confirmed by photographs. Phoebe is described as 'plain and overgrown' compared with her more attractive sister and is 'tall and bony, with a sallow complexion, a harassed expression, and long, perfectly straight hair' (p.38). However, Easter desires her ardently, fascinated by the purity of her face (p.273). In an echo of the necklaces used as fetishistic symbols of inappropriate relationships earlier in the novel, Easter wears a shred of Phoebe's lost handkerchief round his wrist when he appears in court and abides by her request to keep her father's name out of the proceedings, his one redeeming selfless act.

[43] NLW, MS 23366D, p.144/8.

Easter embodies a paradox: his cruel and violent nature is stressed, but this is balanced by the sympathy created for him by the attraction he holds for Phoebe. His violence is partly explained by his passionate nature which in turn is a projection of his creator's energy and vitality. This recalls Evans's journal entry written while she was struggling with *Turf or Stone,* 'When, or where shall Peggy find vitality to equal her own....Oh that I had been a man, I'd have taught them' (Feb. 16th 1933)[44]. Evans clearly felt that the passionate side of her nature was gendered male and Easter is her exploration of this. In a diary entry, which immediately precedes the one quoted above where she sets out Easter's character, she writes:

> Yesterday it was hot, I lay in the full sunshine on the Olivers' lawn. I felt the earth damp beneath the rug, but the blood was drawn to my cheeks by the sun. When I looked at my face I saw I was flushed and fuller. My whole body danced with joy (April 9th 1933)[45].

This recalls Phoebe and her sister lying in the sunshine in the cobbled yard and anticipates scenes in *Autobiography* where she describes drawing vitality from communion with the earth and the natural world. The euphoria she feels affects not only her mood, but also her body, which seems to dance. Easter possesses this physical energy and vitality. In an encounter with Emily Queary, one of his lovers, he is described thus: 'at his most animal he was magnificently unimpaired. That moment he radiated a physical joy fearfully brilliant to behold' (p.157). Emily responds to him with 'a longing sigh'. Easter's tragedy is that his physicality, which could be joyful if linked to the expression of true feeling, too often turns in frustration to cruelty and violence because he is incapable of making the link between his actions and his emotions; between body and mind.

[44] NLW, MS 23366D, p.138/2.
[45] Ibid. p.144/7.

Matt displays the reverse of Easter's animal vitality: he seems 'to lack energy of any sort' (p.59); he is 'drugged with inertia' (p.59) and 'consumed with ennui' (p.29); he is almost disembodied, a shadow. The explanation for this again lies with ill-matched parents: he is the only son of a gentleman and his housekeeper. 'The blood was running thin from its antique source, and in this case was but erratically strengthened' (p.25). Matt perceives the difference between himself and Easter: 'His lustreless eyes took in the groom's vigorous movements... "The life seems to have drained out of me," he thought, "...This chap's full of life"' (p.120). Although he feels that continued existence is too much to bear, he does not have sufficient energy to commit suicide (p.121). Matt is aroused from his lethargy by the passion he feels for Mary, but this relationship fails to convince, because as Evans says in her journal, her book is all about Easter, other characters are 'shadows' (April 11th 1933)[46].

In summary, then, the body in *Turf or Stone* is portrayed as frequently errant and ungovernable, acting from instinct and impulse, beyond the mind's control. These impulses are sexually motivated and often bring suffering. Mary's body is central to the narrative: she suffers in her marriage because of her 'traitorous flesh'; the contract made between her husband and her lover for possession of her body provokes the final scene and her body is marked by her vengeful husband: she is compelled to show the court how Easter has violated her by cutting off her beautiful hair close to the scalp on one side while wishing for a red hot poker to brand her skin (pp.293-4). Mary, Dorothy and Phoebe are all ashamed or humiliated by desire. Desire leads to inappropriate or unsatisfactory relationships which then impact upon the children's relationships in a cycle of misery and frustration: Easter is a 'lovechild' who marries above him; Matt, the only son of a mismatched pair who goes on to fail in his adult sexual relationships. There is no doubt that Evans was drawing on her life experiences, as the daughter of a

[46] NLW, MS 23366D, p.144/8.

similarly mismatched and unhappy couple[47], who found herself in a maelstrom of sexual emotion brought on successively by her desire for the wooden doctor; by passionate encounters with 'Mme Maréchal' while in Brittany; by her attraction to 'the Professor'; and finally in her physical response to Ruth. Phoebe is clearly another exercise in self-exploration and while her attraction to Easter tests credibility in realistic narrative terms, there is a psychological logic to their relationship if Easter is, as I suggest, also representative of his creator. Phoebe, through her adolescent passion, offers Easter, the embodiment of perverted passion, the chance of redemption.

Writing and the Book

In the theme, subject matter and style of *Turf or Stone*, there are significant echoes of writers Evans admired, the Brontës, Byron and Hardy. In attempting to establish her identity as a writer, consciously or unconsciously Evans was, with these references, placing herself in a literary tradition. Paradoxically the result is that this novel lacks the freshness and originality of its predecessors. Evans's knowledge of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is also more evident in the language and plot of this and her next novel than in the earlier ones; meditations on religion and the nature of God are an important element in the autobiographical texts. In *A Ray of Darkness* she explains that although she has 'an implicit faith in a creator', her 'thought now...is not Christian, and mine will never be the Christian consciousness because of my hatred of blood and sacrifice'[48]. Later in the same text, having become seriously ill, she says, 'I myself must find God', but for her there could be no priest (*RD* p.132). It is apparent that Evans shared Hardy's scepticism for organised religion.

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[47] Family members confirm that Peggy's mother Katherine came from a wealthy family, who regarded themselves as socially superior to the Whistlers.

[48] Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness* (London: Arthur Baker, 1952; repr. London: John Calder, 1978), pp. 63-4.
Further references to the John Calder edition are given after quotations in the text (*RD*).

Evans was reading *Far From the Madding Crowd*[49] while she was staying at the Lough Pool Inn in October 1933; she had moved herself there from Lavender Cottage in order to concentrate on her writing. The influence of her reading is apparent in the opening of *Turf or Stone*:

> Early one February morning a tip cart, which was plastered with dried mud and driven by a man with one arm, turned out of a lane some eight miles from Salus, and journeyed slowly along the main road towards the town....The cart contained under a net three ewes, whose breath rose steamily in the cold air. The man, bareheaded, broad-shouldered, sat easily swaying to the movement of the shaft, expanding his chest though the east wind was blowing. He seemed indifferent, durable, hard as the cart itself (p.1).

The measured rhythm of the prose, the male figure strongly identified both with the landscape and his means of employment, faring forward towards a fateful encounter with a young woman of a different class are all suggestive of Hardy. The cart passes Mary as she limps along the road with a weary air: she could be Fanny Robin. She is 'jaded in spirit rather than in fact' and her 'painful meditations' are 'the true brake on her step' (p.2). Again, with Hardyesque symbolism, she has to be raised to the level of her social inferior as she is helped into the cart and the drover smirks to see a lady so reduced. On descending, she drops her prayer book and the frightened ewes tread it beneath their feet, a sign that the religious ceremony for which she is bound is an empty orthodoxy, which will have no power to sustain her; it is an affectation easily trodden beneath the feet of her heedless, inhumane husband.

Evans further undermines organised religion in her portrayal of the vicar who officiates at the wedding ceremony. He 'recalled some corrupt, degenerate idol which had decayed in a jungle. Fat, bloated, yet withered, he stood, his legs shaking visibly beneath the cassock' (p.8). This scathing description emphasising the corruption and anachronistic irrelevance of this man of God is reinforced by his sinister fascination

[49] NLW, MS 23366D, p.152/16.

with women which makes him stand as close to Mary as he could, 'so that he might probe the texture of her skin with his dim eyes' (p.14). He takes her gloved hand and works his fingers 'towards her wrist, bare and warm above her glove' (p.15). He is a hypocrite who knows that the marriage is 'wrong and cruel' (p.8) and yet, because of Mary's obvious pregnancy, he proceeds with the ceremony.

Orthodox religion in its Old Testament form, particularly the concept of retributive justice, is also subtly critiqued in the novel's dénouement. We are told that Easter has lived by this creed: he 'had no ambition of any sort whatever, only a primitive longing to see that he obtained an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (pp.214-215). But Evans mitigates this by giving Easter a wonder in the natural world which reflects her own, as expressed in her contemporary journals and later in *Autobiography*: 'from earliest childhood Easter had moments when he was arrested by moving wonder at a vast earth and a scarcely comprehended sky' (p.215). She uses exactly the same phrase in her journals when meditating on God. She feels she cannot love Him because she cannot feel His presence, but then she remembers that those things she does love are God-given, 'things like the weather, and fields and views, nameless flowers and trees, and a scarcely comprehended sky' (April 26th 1933)[50]. Easter's capacity for wonder inspired by the natural world links him closely with his creator and is a hint that he is not completely irredeemable, which is proved by his behaviour in court. He is sorely tempted to take revenge on Matt for cuckolding him by naming him as Mary's lover; he goads himself on, 'Now then, Easter, tear out that eye and wrench away that tooth!' (p.298). But, despite an intense inner struggle with the demands of his creed, he stays silent for Phoebe's sake. However, this does not save him from falling victim to exactly the same form of primitive justice, and for the same sin. Within the month he is murdered by Tom, husband of his lover, Emily Queary, who

[50] NLW, MS 23366D, p.145/9.

'attacked Easter with a pike, which he had driven into his eye' (p.300). Easter is punished just at the point when he has achieved some grace by putting aside his desire for revenge to save Phoebe from hurt. Old Testament justice makes no allowance for the rehabilitated sinner.

It is significant that Evans named her character after the Christian festival with which she had most difficulty. In *A Ray of Darkness* she says, 'I do know why I hate, hate many of the forms of Christianity and other religions....It is because of the sacrifice at the centre of them – the sacrificial blood' (*RD* p.33). Easter's name with its connotations of suffering, sacrifice and redemption indicates his symbolic significance, especially the meaning of his death. The Biblical language, which Evans uses in connection with him, reinforces this; he is looking for a woman who will 'suffer him' (p.16) and his fruitless search leaves his 'lonely and abandoned spirit' dwelling in a 'wilderness' (p.104). Easter is by far the most nuanced character in the book: it seems likely that what appealed to Evans was the idea of creating a character who was 'odd' and 'strange' (April 11th 1933)[51], grossly flawed, yet with a spark of grace. Her sympathy for her creation is confirmed by Phoebe's reaction to his death in the closing sentences of the novel: 'When Phoebe heard of it she began to cry dreadfully, in a deathly senseless manner, as if every sob would kill her' (p.300).

There are other biblical references connected to Easter: he marries Mary, who reminds the vicar of Mary Magdalen (p.13), the fallen woman who was Christ's disciple, and their home is the Gallustree, the site of a gibbet, a wooden structure of execution: a successor to the cross. Evans's interest in religion, evidenced in this novel, is much more important in her next novel *Creed* where she explores the problems arising from rigid, orthodox belief. She then continues to explore and trace the development of her own faith in her later autobiographical writing.

[51] NLW, MS 23366D, pp.144/7-144/8.

Evans's portrayal of Easter also shows the influence of two authors who powerfully occupied her imagination throughout her life: Byron and Emily Brontë. Years later in a letter to Derek Savage, the literary critic, she suggested that Easter was 'a study of Byron...at the time unconscious, but I still think it was a true interpretation of Byron's personality' (March 24th 1950)[52]. In Easter's womanising, seen as an attempt to capture the feeling he had for a woman who entered and disturbed his consciousness as a child, and his catastrophic marriage to another woman his social superior, there are parallels with Byron's life. However, there are also strong echoes of Heathcliff, another male character whose creator was imaginatively involved with Lord Byron. Easter shares with Heathcliff his gypsy inheritance, his calculating cruelty, his sensuality and physical magnetism. However, Heathcliff finds his soul's twin in Cathy, 'the wild, wick slip' and his love for her lends him a kind of nobility which co-exists with and helps to explain, maybe even to some extent redeem, his malevolence and cruelty[53]. There is no redemptive relationship for Easter; Phoebe might have offered hope of salvation but the spark of their slowly kindling friendship is extinguished by Easter's ignominious death.

There are further echoes of *Wuthering Heights:* the binary presented by the characters of Easter and Matt echoes the counterpoint of Heathcliff and Linton. Matt is the moonbeam to Easter's lightning; the frost to his fire[54]. Evans supplies the source of her novel's title in the book's epigraph: '...Cover him o'er with turf or stone – 'tis all one'. This is part of an epitaph the full text of which is:

> Under this stone lies Gabriel John
> In the year of our Lord one thousand and one.
> Cover his head with turf or stone, 'tis all one.
> Pray for the soul of gentle John,
> If you will you may, or let it alone, 'tis all one[55].

[52] Margiad Evans, NLW, File 10, Savage Letters.
[53] Brontë, *Wuthering Heights,* p.33.
[54] Brontë, *Wuthering Heights,* p.63.
[55] *Song lyrics* [online]. Available at: http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text [Accessed February 14th 2012]

However, it seems very likely, given Evans's enthusiasm for *Wuthering Heights* and the parallels between Easter and Heathcliff, that she also had in mind the three headstones on the slope next the moor: 'the middle one, grey, and half buried in heath – Edgar Linton's only harmonized by the turf, and moss creeping up its foot – Heathcliff's still bare'[56].

The extent of Evans's imaginative identification with the Brontës, as well as her capacity for self dramatisation, is illustrated by an account of a visit made by the writer Arthur Calder Marshall to Lavender Cottage in May 1934. Marshall described his visit in a letter written in the 1960s to Arnold Thorpe, Evans's would-be biographer. Marshall admits that he was inclined to think of the Whistler sisters romantically, but when he arrived:

> I found that I was precipitated into a drama of the Brontës. Haworth had been translated into Herefordshire. Margiad was quite certainly Emily. Sian was rather reluctantly Charlotte...The generating station of this Brontë was Peggy Whistler, who for some reason could not bear to be Peggy Whistler, but had to be Margiad Evans...there was a strong element of play-acting in it. For some reason, she had to play-act [57].

Marshall goes on to relate how Evans was dressed for the part in a 'Victorian habit of black serge' and how even her movements seemed false, as if she was trying to mimic Emily's stride. He was impressed, though, by the way she talked about her neighbours with genuine interest, as Emily might have talked about the people of Haworth. Most significantly he remarks that 'she had no life of her own externally and needed these people to express things for her'[58]. This observation reinforces my perception of Evans as someone who sought to express herself through multiple identities: Peggy, Margiad, Arabella, Phoebe, even Easter...and Emily. To the young, impressionable Arthur Calder Marshall, she was poor at playing Emily, but she was 'splendid' when projecting her

[56] Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*, p.258.
[57] NLW File 22, Arnold Thorpe papers.
[58] Ibid.

personality through her stories of others. In June 1948, fourteen years after Marshall's visit to 'Haworth in Herefordshire', Evans published an essay 'Byron and Emily Brontë' in *Life and Letters Today*. In it she says that Brontë's prose and poetry contain 'the tears and iciness of imagination, and the very essence of the *projected personalities* by which she enlarged her literal existence'[59]; she could have been writing about herself.

The writer in *Turf or Stone* is Phoebe, one of Evans's projected personalities, the style and content of whose journal is closely modelled on Evans's own: it is less a diary than 'a record of her vague, unhappy thoughts' (p.160). In it, Phoebe describes her sense of being haunted by Easter and the shame it brings: she feels that she is no longer innocent and pure, that this attraction somehow defiles her, but she cannot bear to see this written down:

> For some reason she felt violently ashamed when she had written these last words. She quickly tore out the page, put it in the grate and burnt it to ashes. The next day she destroyed the whole book (p.162).

Phoebe's action anticipates a similar move on Evans's part to destroy written records:

> Before coming to bed I burned my old letters and diaries having sorted them, torn them up and poured a can of parafin [sic] over them. They flamed, and black scraps lighted of their burden of words, floated over the hedge (June 11th 1934)[60].

Applying Lacanian theory, the burning of the 'burden' of words by Evans and her alter ego could be seen as an attempted retreat from the disturbing world of the symbolic, to the imaginary where the individual can regain an illusory sense of wholeness,

[59] Evans, 'Byron and Emily Brontë', p.204.
[60] NLW, MS 23366D, p.192/64.

untroubled by desire[61]. The gap created by their loss is as expressive as the words themselves.

Evans also uses a dialogue between Phoebe and her eccentric music teacher to articulate her frustration with her own writing. The music teacher is angry with Phoebe for demanding proof that Chopin had a sense of humour. He argues that this is beyond proof, it is about understanding, perception, but he can see that the words he is using do not adequately express his meaning: 'there are no words. You may know your grammar. Good. You can sit down and write out verbs. But you cannot write a living book...' (p.232). The use of the phrase 'living book' recalls the difficulties she was having with her 'bloody, limping writing' (Oct. 31st 1933)[62], in contrast to *The Wooden Doctor*, which lived. There is the implication that to make a book live, words have to be accurate reflections of sympathy and deeply felt emotion, a dilemma Evans returns to in *Autobiography.*

In a letter written in December 1943, Evans remarks that she feels that there are two distinct writers in her, one of whom is 'the thump-thump one who wrote *Turf or Stone*'[63]. One of the most 'thumping' aspects of the novel's style is Evans's tendency to 'overwrite', especially the physical appearance of even the most minor characters: the vicar who is 'fat, bloated yet withered' (p.8); Mrs Davis whose black hair grew horribly low on her neck (p.62); the pub landlord who is a 'tall, pulpy man' whose skin resembles 'wet clay' (p.86); the skin tones of all the magistrates are described as, 'sallow', 'waxen', sickly' and olive-skinned. Tom Queary is 'a drunken dissipated Punchinello. His red nose, thin grotesque face, puckered eyes and broken teeth...made a figure at once amusing and sinister' (p.153). The same could be said of Gladys, the new servant who has the unfortunate habit of taking her glass eye out at meal times,

[61] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits,* a selection translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (First pub. Editions du Seuil, 1966; First translation, Tavistock, 1977; repr. London: Routledge, 1997), pp.1-7.
[62] NLW, MS 23366D, p.156/19.
[63] Margiad Evans, NLW File 7 No.6. Letter to Gwyn Jones, 6 December 1943.

'smothering its blue stare in a handkerchief' (p.86). Similar treatment is given to Easter; when Phoebe catches sight of him through a pane of glass:

> The greyish-green colour of the dirty glass lent an odd tinge to his skin; he looked livid, the upper teeth were showing, and a large spider's web, really on the inside, seemed at that distance to be hanging from his mouth (p.42).

The relentless descriptions can seem formulaic and farcical: we are presented with surreal two-dimensional grotesques, figures from a fairy tale by Grimm, painted figures from a Punch and Judy show or a child's nightmare. However, such vignettes persist in her next novel and are a feature of her journals and her last unpublished texts. In *The Immortal Hospital* she describes Kate, a servant at her uncle's farm: 'When we knew her she still had a nimble smile, false teeth and clear red hair that frizzled. Her face was the colour of raspberries and was rough in texture'[64]. Colour and texture often feature in these descriptions: Evans observes with the eye of an artist. Her sense of the bodily grotesque also relates to her heightened awareness of her own body and her sense that she was ugly and ungainly.

Basil Blackwell told Evans that he thought that 'Easter' was a 'magnificent jigsaw' (Sept. 23rd 1933)[65]. He might have been referring to her inclusion of eccentric anecdotes, like the story of Easter and the escaped lunatic (pp.115-119) and Emma the 'mild and gracious' cow who escaped the abattoir to frighten Dorothy out for a walk (pp.126-7). These episodes have no bearing on the plot and interrupt the narrative flow; they have the flavour of stories heard in the bar of the Lough Pool Inn included in her narrative, when they might have been better utilised as raw material for her short stories.

However, there are magnificent elements in the writing, including vivid passages describing the natural world, which look forward to *Autobiography.*

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[64] NLW, MS 23369C, *The Immortal Hospital* (1957), p.8.
[65] NLW, MS 23366D, p.152/16.

These are often used to reflect the mood of the characters, for example Matt's inertia interspersed with moments of violence and passion is mirrored by the clouds as he watches them gathering before a storm:

> Low-hanging clouds, lividly rose in colour, were rolling slowly before a sultry breeze, and more remote ones, bronze, indigo, greenish black, spanned the horizon...The air was blighted, a peculiar unnatural dusk closed in, and minute by minute the atmosphere thickened. The breeze died. Momentarily he expected the darting lightning. He stood in a kind of torpor (p.128).

One of the most effective passages in the novel, Evans's description of Emily Queary sitting up late plucking a fowl, shows the writer at her best, transcending the 'thump thump' of more strained elements in the novel to produce a complex image marrying together the important themes of corporality and mortality:

> She sat on a settle.....a hurricane lamp at her side throwing its whitish light in a broken circle over her limp figure, and repeating the same strange cubistic curves more palely among the slender beams which supported the roof. She wore a white apron over her ordinary muddled dress, and held the fowl on her lap while she carefully stowed the feathers in a sack at her feet. The bits of red and green paste in her hair comb shone like glow -worms, her small hands were the same colour as the dead bird's stiff feet (p.154).

The description of how the lamp shapes blocks of light and shade 'strange cubistic curves' recalls Peggy Whistler's illustrations, particularly the frontispiece for *The Wooden Doctor.* Emily's mood is captured by her limp posture and her muddled dress, but despite her weariness she is a careful housewife, stowing the feathers in a sack for future use. The cheap, shining hair combs betray Emily's fantasy life, the desire for vitality which draws her to Easter; they also recall the necklaces worn by Dorothy and Mrs Fitzgerald to make themselves more desirable, to bind men to them both literally and metaphorically. They are green and red evoking the living fowl now a corpse on Emily's lap, in the same way as both dead bird and living woman are linked by the colour and stiffness of the woman's hands and the bird's feet. It is a multi-layered image, powerful not only in its visual effect, but in its suggestion that the bright combs

like the bird's bright plumage and Dorothy's bright clothes merely provide temporary distraction from the mortality of the cold, stiff, livid flesh.

Mortality and morbid thoughts, often linked to a feeling of physical illness and frustration with her writing, permeate her journal entries for the period of the novel's creation: 1933 – early 1934. I suggest that the feeling of malaise that she reports is linked to symptoms associated with petit mal epilepsy. The fact that she attributes these sensations to her character, Mary, in the book reinforces the impression that they were part of her contemporary experience, as do her journal entries: 'Everything looks pale, nothing tastes sharp, a kind of thick woollen mat seems to hang between me and reality' (Feb. 27th 1933)[66]; 'I feel overwrought work's bad – a fog over Easter which lifted blindingly in bed. I had something like a brainstorm – couldn't sleep for hours' (Sept. 4th 1933)[67]. And 'My head aches, a dead foggy ache that makes it heavy. This is one of the times when if somebody burned Easter under my nose I wouldn't be roused' (Oct. 29th 1933)[68]. Writing cannot rescue her from the effect of the dull headaches and the sense of being detached from reality; in fact these feelings prevent her from writing. But she struggles on determined to breathe her own life into Easter, but in the knowledge that she will also bring about his death (April 11th 1933)[69].

Evans describes Easter's death and Phoebe's reaction to it in the final eighty words of the novel. His death is brutal and the effect is all the more shocking for the reader because the facts are presented economically and dispassionately: it was related in court that Tom, cuckolded husband of Emily, one of Easter's mistresses, '...attacked Easter with a pike, which he had driven into his eye. Easter died instantly' (p.300).

[66] NLW, MS 23366D, p.140/4.
[67] Ibid. p.150/14.
[68] Ibid. p.155/19.
[69] Ibid. p.144/8.

In considering the ending of *The Wooden Doctor* I discussed the idea that narrative drive and a satisfactory conclusion to a realist novel depend on the recovery of a lost object, whereas Modernist texts tend to accept the inevitability of loss[70]. *Turf or Stone*, like *Country Dance*, ends with the death of the central character, so in this sense there is no restoration, there is only loss.

In the entry in her journal for September 8th 1933 Evans writes, 'My mind is thronged with wordless inchoate thoughts all sad, all morbid'[71]. The fact that these thoughts are 'wordless' is significant. Three out of four of Evans's novels, including this one, end in the silence of death, while *The Wooden Doctor* comes to an abrupt 'And that's the end'. According to Lacan, death is the triumph of the Real, which is everything outside the symbolic, including the experience of trauma, when we are thrown back into the baby's experience of helpless speechlessness and death, which puts a physical end to subjectivity and meaning[72]. By ending her novels with the trauma of death, Evans enacts a return to the Real, to speechlessness. However, there is a sound at the end of *Turf or Stone*, but it does not have the coherence of the symbolic, of language, it is the sound of Phoebe weeping at the news of Easter's death. It is the final sentence of the text: 'When Phoebe heard of it she began to cry dreadfully and heavily, in a deathly senseless manner, as if every sob would kill her' (p.300). Phoebe and Easter, Evans's two projections in the novel, share in the final trauma: it is as if Easter and Phoebe have died together: she cries as if she will cry herself to death. In the silence of death and the incoherence of grief, the Real has triumphed.

[70] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp.160-1.
[71] NLW, MS 23366D p.151/14.
[72] Minsky (1998), pp.64-7.

4

Creed: a Modernist novel?

Margiad Evans's fourth and final novel, *Creed,* was written during 1935 and completed in January 1936. Although there is a break in Evans's Journals between July 1934 and September 1935, we know from what survives that this was a very turbulent period in her personal life and it is my contention that this turbulence is reflected in her writing. Unlike the earlier novels, it is difficult to read any single character as a projection of Evans, although Menna, with her alcoholic mother and importunate lover, perhaps comes closest. I will argue, however, that in this text Evans again explores her own central relationships through those of her characters: the trauma for a child who is forced to confront her parent's alcoholism; the impact of inadequate mothering on their children's adult relationships; and the complexities of desire, especially for lovers whose relationship may be judged as sinful or even perverted, as she feared her relationship with Ruth might be regarded.

Notions of sin and punishment are powerfully present in Evans's writing: they inform her characterisation of Easter in *Turf or Stone* and they resurface in *A Ray of Darkness* as she considers whether her epilepsy is a punishment for the sin of neglecting her writing. Anxiety about the possibility of her desire for Ruth being seen as sinful may have influenced her choice of a theme in which a strict judgemental religious moral code, personified by Dollbright, is challenged and found wanting, to be replaced by a more forgiving, nuanced morality. *Creed* charts the spiritual journey of Francis Dollbright from the opening scene of the novel in which he states his confidence in the righteousness of his creed in opposition to that of the priest, Ifor Morriss, to the end when he is described as a man 'possessed by freedom', freedom, that is, from his

religious faith. He addresses God: 'Oh God, I have taken separate existence from you and you cannot pour my one soul back into yourself!'(p.233).

In a letter to Derek Savage dated April 1950 Evans remarked that *Creed* was 'the story of Job'[1]. Dollbright, like Job, starts from the premise that God, as judge, will reward the righteous and punish the evil-doer. Dollbright is, therefore, offended by a sermon by Morriss in which he asserts that he has seen God in the body of a murderess, bearing with her the misery of her conviction and execution and saving her body into eternity (p.8). Dollbright, outraged, responds: 'What's the use of being good if the wicked enter the same reward?'(p.14). He believes that a man's sin is made manifest in his outward appearance, the sinful man 'becomes coarse, bloated; his flesh decays, his bones rot. He is a distorted bulk, burns inside himself. He grows hideous and repulsive – dreadful to everybody' (pp.14-15). The idea that sin is made manifest in the outward appearance of the body is an image which recurs throughout both the novel and the contemporary journals and, as I will show, is central to Evans's thinking at this period.

Creed in its context: Evans's crises of identity

The book of Job raises the difficult problem of why an all-powerful God allows good people to suffer; through its central character, *Creed* examines themes of just reward and punishment. During 1935 and early 1936, while writing the novel, Evans was confronting a range of deeply personal moral issues in her own life. In the Journal which she began on 12th September 1935, Evans describes her growing obsession with Ruth Farr, introduced into the household the previous year by Peggy's mother, and her simultaneous infatuation with her publisher, Basil Blackwell, often referred to in the Journal as 'the professor'. She dedicated the volume:

To myself – and after that
To the Professor

[1] Margiad Evans, NLW, File 10, Savage Letters.

The journal also chronicles difficulties in her relationship with her mother who repeatedly leaves her husband, home and children only to return to further rows and acrimony, and her father's last illness and death on Christmas morning from alcohol-related liver disease.

The Journal is written in a large bound notebook given to her by Blackwell on the front cover of which she has written, Arabella's Voice. Evans tends to adopt the name Arabella when she is feeling particularly beleaguered. She often uses it when exhorting herself to action, either literal or metaphorical, e.g. 'Run, Arabella, run!' (April 26th 1934)[2], or 'Help me rude, fierce Arabella, help me live tomorrow for you' (June 15th 1934)[3]. She expresses her sense that Arabella is her essential self in July 1934 when she writes, in a section addressed to 'the Professor':

> Yet in many ways the Arabella you think you understand, indeed the Arabella you do understand is strongly detestable to me....But believe me finally to my disquiet I am discovering that person is my true self, and the guise my natural garment![4]

By calling this Journal 'Arabella's Voice', she is, therefore, indicating that in this notebook she will be revealing her essential self; there is perhaps a further implication that this private book is the only place where Arabella can have a voice.

The twin dedications to the Professor and to Ruth show that these two obsessional relationships, present in the earlier diaries, continued to dominate her emotional life throughout late 1935 and into 1936, the period of *Creed*'s composition. The name she gives to Blackwell inevitably recalls Charlotte Brontë's hopeless, but artistically productive, passion for M. Heger while a pupil teacher in Brussels. It seems as if Peggy might have looked up to her publisher as a wise father figure, someone

[2] NLW, MS 23366D, p.176/46.
[3] Ibid. p.207/68.
[4] Ibid. p.223/81.

whose good opinion and respect she craved, much as Charlotte looked to her professor as teacher, guide, the perfect man. When Blackwell tells her that she is a better writer than her sister Nancy because she has 'the greater heart' she writes: '...you're wrong but the words are precious because you said them, and you are, oh you are what I look for in a man, good, gentle, kind and faithful' (April 1st 1933)[5]. Like Charlotte Brontë, Peggy bombarded Blackwell with letters and her diary records that these sometimes went unanswered much to her disappointment (August 6th 1933)[6]. Despite this she asserts that she loves him.

This is the situation she was in when her meeting with Ruth Farr in February 1934 complicated things immeasurably. The two are drawn together and the Journals record Peggy's fascination with Ruth, their growing intimacy and her worries that their relationship is 'unnatural'. She describes her own 'ordinary face' and 'body shaping from girl to woman' but senses that hidden beneath this there is something altogether more wild and unconventional, something with 'animal's teeth and savage eyes' (12th Sept 1935)[7]. Perhaps, like Dollbright, she believed that somehow observers would be able to read her sin inscribed on her body's surface, but the 'wild, unconventional' side of herself is hidden from view. Nevertheless, she fears that the relationship is doomed because the 'physchologists' [*sic*] (Nov. 30th 1935) will separate them[8]. At the thought she feels sick, as if 'something terrible will come to life in me'[9].

Evans's journal entries over this period are frenetic and agitated. There are sentences, paragraphs, sometimes whole pages ripped or blacked out as if she has dipped a brush in Indian ink to cancel out her words, and as she identifies so closely with her book it is tempting to view this as an attempt to erase herself. Later in the journal, she makes clear this association between body and book: 'The book is full of

[5] NLW, MS 23366D, p.143/6.
[6] Ibid. p.147/10.
[7] NLW, MS 23577C, p.5.
[8] Ibid. p.25.
[9] Ibid. p.25.

my touch, almost of my living heart' (June 20 1936)[10]. She records feeling, 'bad, uncontrolled, almost desperate' (Sept. 19th 1935)[11], torn between her feelings for Ruth and an acknowledgement of how the world would judge their relationship: 'I adore her – she worships me and the word they yell is wrong wrong wrong' (Dec. 10th 1935)[12]. It seems that the two young women sought medical advice and were recommended to contact the eminent sexologist, Havelock Ellis. Evans records on December 15th 1934 that Ruth has received a letter from him, unfortunately the letter has been lost[13]. However, Ellis is known to have theorised that lesbians were 'male inverts', that is men in women's bodies[14]. This thinking is apparent in some of Evans's comments about Ruth: 'I want to be faithful to her always, to give her all that a man would have of his wife. She understands, my darling, my beloved. We shall not part until one is beyond darkness' (Nov. 10th 1935)[15]. An entry for four days later, November 14th, refers to the first anniversary of their 'wedding', perhaps indicating that their affair started in earnest in November of the previous year, nine months after their first meeting. The protestations of devotion to Ruth in 'Arabella's Voice' are even more passionately stated than those to the professor which run alongside them. 'Ruth love me love me' (Sept. 18th 1935)[16], and 'I love her to love me so' (Jan. 21st 1936)[17]. Yet only a few weeks before she was reporting, 'a blind instinctive craving for the professor' (Nov.10th 1935)[18].

These confused and disturbing feelings are played out against the backdrop of a household dominated by the drunken ravings of Peggy's terminally ill father. She describes him as often delirious and delusional. He calls out from his sickbed for

[10] NLW, MS 23577C, p.90.
[11] Ibid. p.6a.
[12] Ibid. p.27a.
[13] Ibid. p.28a.
[14] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion,* Vol. 2 (First pub.1927; repub. ebook Project Gutenberg Ebook Studies, 2005), pp.154-203 (171). Consulted: 10.11.11.éé
[15] Ibid. p.15a.
[16] Ibid. p.6.
[17] Ibid. p.45.
[18] Ibid. p.14a.

whisky; he holds 'horrible conversations with his loud dreams' 'in unearthly tones' (Sept. 28th 1935)[19]. In November 1934 she was left alone to care for him for three weeks, which must have been terrifying as well as emotionally draining. In this context, Evans often describes Ruth as her sanity (Oct. 10th 1935)[20], and this continues after her father's death: 'She is my sanity. She is my hope and my darling earthly love' (Jan 20th 1936)[21]. She is someone to cling to when *in extremis*:

> I hear Dad moving, thumping on the doors and opening the drawer for whisky. How he must dream. And wake choking with insatiable thirst...Ruthie! Ruthie! I fell on her breast. She held me. Her beloved eyes looked down on me (Nov. 11th 1935)[22].

Again in her journal Evans dwells on the physical manifestations of her father's self-inflicted and therefore arguably sinful disease:

> He screams. He cannot lift his back or his belly. Beneath the white beard on his cheeks a green shadow ebbs and flows. His mouth is the mouth of a dying man: it falls open like a grave (Dec. 10th 1935)[23].

In addition to her own turbulent private life the novel was written in the context of an increasingly dark mood in the country. Unemployment and poverty blighted many lives, while in Germany the rise of Hitler threatened European stability with the prospect of war. The relationship between private and public turmoil is vividly illustrated by an entry in her Journal for September 27th 1935 on a visit to Ruth at her family home at Tretire Court, about four miles from Peggy's home at Bridstow:

> I go to Tretire with Ruth. I dream war has been declared – bombs and shrapnel are reality: dread is the horizon, men's brains and entrails manure the bloated fields. Livid faces swim in the images of hunger and disease, whole defeated streets are blank...I wake to see my love's fine-covered head. It's little comfort – there's no comfort even that holds the thought of war [24].

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[19] NLW, MS 23577C, p.9a.
[20] Ibid. p.13.
[21] Ibid. p.41.
[22] Ibid. p.16.
[23] Ibid. p.27.
[24] NLW, MS 23577C, p.8.

The language she uses here to describe the horror and dread she experienced when confronted with the war torn landscape of her dream again links sin and body and disease. The obscenity of war causes the fields to 'bloat' with the carcases of the fallen; the streets are 'defeated'. It is significant that this dream occurs while she sleeps with Ruth. The dream images coupled with her fear that the relationship is 'unnatural' contribute to a general sense within the journal that the times are out of joint, and it is this mood which overflows into her writing, and is evident in *Creed*'s setting, its characters and their relationships.

Setting: Images of the Body

Creed is set close to Evans's home in a town she calls Chepsford. Chepsford has a respectable neighbourhood, High Town, but it has another, darker side, dominated by the flourmill and the gasworks. In this it resembles both Ross-on-Wye, which appears as Salus in the earlier novels, and it also strongly recalls Thomas Hardy's Casterbridge as it is portrayed in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). Mill Street like Mixen Lane is 'a mildewed leaf in the sturdy and flourishing' town whose inhabitants nevertheless possess a vitality and relish for life that belies their circumstances; much of the business of Mixen Lane is conducted after dark in the form of drinking, poaching and prostitution and it is here that the skimmity ride takes place[25]. Evans could be describing the same people in her representation of the inhabitants of Mill Street:

> The lamps flared on the broken windows, the wind careered with rubbish in the low-roofed alleys while the people played the concertina, drank, fought and lay down on the pavements with their caps over their faces and grit in their verminous hair (pp.192-3).

[25] Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (First pub. 1886; repr. London and Basingstoke: MacMillan and Co Ltd., 1971), p.255.

Evans employs images of rottenness and disease similar to those used in the entry from her Journal for Sept. 27th 1935 in her description of the Mill Street area[26]:

> It was a long, sloping street, rather narrow, having the mill at one end and the grey gas works at the other. Many of the hovels were condemned but had not yet been vacated; they were old, filthy and terribly dilapidated with thick, grimy plaster peeling off the walls, laths peeping through gaps like bones through rotting flesh (p.192).

In the same way as the fields devastated by war, the town is embodied and its hovels and tenements are like sores or wounds on the body. She describes the squalid housing as 'scabby hovels' (p.193) which cannot be improved because there are no town councillors prepared to 'condemn their worn out carcasses, exchange their tumbling ruins for upright limbs, and lay on clean blood from the mains' (p.193). The town is represented as a corrupted body and resembles Dollbright's description of the vile body of a sinner (pp.14-15 quoted above).

'Arabella's Voice' opens with the following:

> Nothing is clear to me. I have a tumour that will not burst. I will struggle. I will not decline and sicken away. If I must I'll take a knife to myself – you Arabella know that I will. I'll cut away thought, tear my books and burn all I've written and write never again (Sept. 12th 1936)[27].

The tumour that she threatens to excise from her own body, and it is significant that she calls on her alter ego, Arabella, to confirm that she really has the strength to do this, seems to consist of thought: her writing, her intellectual life which is growing and growing like a tumour to such an extent that it is threatening her very existence. *Why* she feels like this is unclear but the idea that her writing is something organic and of the body is a continuous thread through the work. Images of tumours also recur. In an entry for July 1934 she writes describing 'Arabella': 'I feel that exalted body is an ulcer oozing oil'[28], and in May 1936 she ponders: 'Am I cankered? Am I the worm?'[29]. The

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[26] See p.6.
[27] NLW, MS 23577C, p.1.
[28] Margiad Evans, NLW MS 23366D, p.223/81.
[29] NLW, MS 23577C, p.80.

image may derive from her first hand observations of her mother's experience of breast cancer[30].

Haunted as she clearly was by such images, it is perhaps not surprising that cancer features in her novel as one of the tests of faith Dollbright undergoes in the course of the narrative. Creed can be read as a new 'pilgrim's progress' in that it concerns a man who undertakes a journey of faith. However, Bunyan's Christian starts his journey doubting his own worthiness and is strengthened in his faith by resisting and vanquishing the challenges he meets on the way, whereas Dollbright sets off convinced of his righteousness and the challenges he meets along the way undermine his faith so that his final destination is far away from the Celestial City. Dollbright's wife's cancer is one such challenge.

Dollbright's marriage: the suffering body

Dollbright's dogmatic application of his moral code has already put their marriage under pressure even before he learns of his wife's illness. His response to Ifor Morriss's sermon, with which the novel opens, is that he must demonstrate his moral convictions by resigning from the job he has held for fifteen years as manager of a hardware store owned by John Bridges because Bridges is living openly with another man's wife. Dollbright's thinking is that he would be a hypocrite to continue working for someone whom he considers to be a sinner. After listening to the sermon it struck him for the first time that

> Bridges and this rotten parson were potent to work harm, to pull those of frail strength down beside their complacent length, to contaminate and loosen evil influences: that if it were in God to punish them eternally it was in man to curb them on earth (p.21).

[30] See Ch.2, p.76, fn.36.

Dollbright considers his resignation to be his way of curbing the evil influence of his employer.

The first glimpse of Dollbright's marriage occurs when he conveys this decision to his wife. Her reaction is one of horrified disbelief. She accuses him of either being mad or following 'a cracked false idol of religion' (p.28). As a devout Baptist, she warns him against spiritual pride. This bitter dispute establishes the Dollbrights' marriage as one of disharmony and discontent. Francis senses contempt beneath his wife's outward display of righteous anger and wonders whether her resentment has been building over the years. In the midst of the quarrel he reaches out to her in grief as she sleeps but cannot bring himself to wake her; the distance between them is too great. He ignores her protests and following his conscience resigns his job.

The Dollbrights' marriage is barren; a fact which consoles Florence when she learns that she must have a lump removed from her breast. If it is malignant, at least she does not have to worry about having passed the disease on to her children: 'Florence thanked God she had no children, lest *this* should be running in their veins' (p.62). This image of contaminated blood recalls the images used to describe the town quoted above. This sense of heritable contamination is associated for the couple with the idea of sin, which they feel must have brought on this suffering. If only the sinful are punished, according to Dollbright's creed, then whose sin has called down this suffering upon his wife? Immediately after being told that an operation is essential to cut out the tumour, Florence thinks 'vindictively' of her husband, 'as if her illness were a punishment to him' (p.62). She is certain that the sinner is not herself, but her husband puffed up with his 'fine, religious pride' (p.43). When he learns of her illness he is devastated, tears 'wetted a face that was stiff and changeless as an iron mould' (p.88). He also becomes convinced that her sickness is God's punishment for his sin: 'God had punished Florence for him, God had sown the cancer in her breast, and it had thrived on his sin'

(p.130). Visiting her in hospital after the operation, he feels 'true horror...loaded with guilt' (p.136).

Florence perceives her body as contaminated, literally eaten away by the disease, which she describes as an invading organism, 'To think of such a bitter ugly thing hiding here, here, eating my life out like a worm eating me, as if I were dead' (p.42). The cancer is linked to maternity: Florence recalls how her mother died of the same disease, the implication being that this is something which has been passed to her in the womb. The disease has now attacked her breast and transformed it from a life giving, nurturing part of her body to one filled with poison and death. Instead of a baby growing inside her, 'She imagined her cancer as something alive in her body, something hungry and blind and revolting, like a worm. Hour by hour it was growing and ripening' (p.84). Florence's diseased body is linked metaphorically to the poor, decaying area of the town in which she lives by shared images. Terrified that the hidden worm inside her body might be growing and killing her she wanders the streets in the 'smelly twilight'. She notices that 'the gutters, running like sores, the black fissures in the pavement, the angles where the buildings met the ground all seemed filled with poison, with secret diseases ready to fall and feed upon the fair and tempting' (p.85). Just as her own body harbours unseen the seeds of its own destruction so 'all the glare, the rattle and the paint of existence' cannot cover the 'decay and terror' (p.86) hidden beneath the surface of the town.

Just as Florence feels her body has been physically invaded by the cancer, so the fact of his wife's illness metaphorically invades her husband's consciousness, 'He knew then at last, and far away he wanted to die. The weevil was through the skin. Every thought ended in the shock of his wife's cancer' (p.128). Part of the reason for Dollbright's extreme reaction to his wife's illness is that he feels obliged, having failed to find alternative employment, to go back to John Bridges and plead to be reinstated in

his old job. Bridges' first reaction is to throw him out of the house because of his 'damned religious impertinence', so Dollbright is forced to plead his cause by referring to his wife's illness. This has a devastating effect on him: 'The crab had conquered. He had lost the pride of his severe laws. He had broken them' (p.95). Bridges is infuriated remembering that Dollbright left his employment because he disapproved of him living in sin, but when Dollbright's pleas are reinforced by those of Barbara, Bridges' mistress, he relents: 'All right. Apparently sinners have their uses. Thought you'd be a martyr, Dollbright, then found your wife was carrying the tail of your cross!' (pp.97-8).

Both Ifor Morriss's sermon and his wife's illness challenge Dollbright's creed and having to renege on his principles is another blow. Again links are made through Evans's choice of image: Dollbright had described his employer as being 'as dangerous as contagious diseases' (p.29). He saw him and the 'rotten parson' as being capable of exerting considerable power and influence on weaker individuals with their ability 'to contaminate and loosen evil influences.' Again the images are those of disease, rottenness and contamination. Following his re-employment Dollbright feels weighed down, oppressed by his hatred of Morriss and Bridges, and in the maelstrom of emotions they have unleashed in him he can find no God to help him. Dollbright calls on God to curse them because they have brought about this estrangement:

> He hated Ifor Morriss. He hated Bridges. They had overrun him; he was down under them, and in this waste there was no God to set him up as high as them...They were anathema. He wanted to strip them, to burn their houses, to preach at them and see them beggars... God curse them for the loss of him! (p.105).

Morriss and Bridges are connected: Bridges is fond of 'the scandalous parson' because he acknowledges his relationship with Barbara, 'in the face of the whole uncharitable parish' (pp.78-9). They also share knowledge of Dollbright's implacable condemnatory nature; they see him as an enemy, but as Morriss declares, he is a formidable opponent,

'A wild enemy to us and to our century, with the primitive strength to *condemn.* A bigot, but how one can fear him!' (p.78).

John Bridges and Barbara: a sinful relationship - the sexualised body

The novel generally portrays marriage as riven with resentment and disease, and the marital home as dark and airless. Ifor Morriss's home is a 'large, dank Rectory, all stone and damp and obscurity'; every surface is covered with dust and the windows are dirty. His wife has 'greasy hair and a sallow face'; she is 'stuffy and sly, and she liked to sit in airless corners with her feet on a footstool and the dog on her lap' (p.75). Dollbright lives in a narrow house next to the mill yard, surrounded and hemmed in by high brick walls. In strong contrast the relationship between Bridges and Barbara, his mistress, although irregular and sinful in Dollbright's eyes, is portrayed as arguably the most successful in the novel and their house is a beacon of light and warmth set in a town characterised by darkness. In Bridges' house, light shines from the windows all night through 'as if the place were burning through a shell' (p.20). Barbara herself is portrayed as beautiful, intellectual and rather exotic set against the backdrop of her house which is full of colour, warmth and light.

The treatment of Barbara links her to female characters who appear in the earlier novels, particularly Mrs de Kuyper in *The Wooden Doctor* and Dorothy in *Turf or Stone*. All three are typically placed against exotic backgrounds, often involving red or crimson flowers or fabrics and bright birds; all three are beautiful with a powerful physical presence and an awareness of their own sexual power. We learn that Barbara's sitting room has Chinese silks on the walls (p.79), that there are great green parakeets in the pattern of the carpet and that 'the room was hot and full of crimson cyclamen' (p.92). In this setting, while Dollbright is waiting for her husband in an adjoining room, Barbara lies down on the carpet as if chained down through the gold bracelets on her

wrists 'like an idol with lacquered nails and pierced ears...She spread out her arms; her breasts pointed to the ceiling. "Oh, beautiful limbs and vanquished breasts, is there nothing more to come?"' (p.91). As Barbara lies in this powerless, almost sacrificial, pose this question seems to be an expression of her dissatisfaction with her situation. However, the question is given a paragraph of its own which might indicate that this is the author's comment on her character as a kept woman living beyond the pale of society, rather than an awareness that she is attributing to the character herself, especially as Barbara has taken up this position voluntarily.

The fact that this type of woman recurs in similar settings in three out of the four novels indicates that the image had a powerful hold on its creator and is one of the ways in which her texts are linked. In all three cases the women are beautiful, vibrant, passionate and gifted, either artistically or musically, and all three have complicated emotional lives, reflecting that of their creator.

Colour plays an important role in Evans's writing: as an artist she has an eye for visual effect, as a writer she is aware of its symbolic power. Barbara's white skin and black hair and her bright, colourful home provide a stark contrast to Florence and her environment. This is emphasised by two incidents in which the rich vibrant colours of Barbara's world impinge on Florence's. The first is when Florence tries to comfort herself by buying a bunch of perfumed violets, only to be told by the florist that they are not for sale because they are part of a regular daily order made by John Bridges for his mistress (p.85). She consoles herself by buying a bottle of violet water instead, but she cannot forget the violets and thinks that she might bear her illness better if Francis could afford such luxury. The second is when Barbara sends a silk dressing jacket and a get well note to Florence. Delighted, she puts it on but the effect is unfortunate, 'The wisps of her grey hair twined on the silk; her appearance was strangely clumsy and bedizened' (p.116). Barbara's gift only serves to point up the difference between them.

Although Dollbright abominates the way Bridges and his mistress live, considering that their way of life reflects Bridges' atheist philosophy, Evans shows a relationship which is apparently companionable, intimate and secure. After Dollbright's departure Bridges explains his atheism to Barbara as they lie in bed hand in hand. According to his philosophy, man has no need of a god because he is sufficient unto himself. He articulates a powerfully humanist creed:

> While I live I am powerful, because I am complete. I don't need a faith, and I don't ask a god... I feel a frightful, a really blasphemous contempt for god-worship. Destroy it and let's have a fair look at man. He is perfect in himself, or should be: if he isn't he's a faulty machine...What things I want this world produces (p.101).

By comparison, there are no similarly harmonious scenes between Dollbright and his wife. Their relationship is much more complex and troubled. The first time we see them together there is discord and bitterness between them and although he feels sorry for his wife in her illness, and guilt because he believes he may be responsible for her suffering, this only serves to further complicate matters. After Florence's operation he is told that the tumour is malignant and at this point, 'He did not know if he loved her or if he felt deeply repentant towards her; only that he was separate from her and from everything but his clinging self and the terrible reality of self' (p.128). He cannot concentrate on the fact of her illness because his preoccupation with his own spiritual state dominates everything.

Dollbright as judge: sins of the flesh

Dollbright's moral code is also challenged by his dealings with his lodgers, an elderly brother and sister, Benjamin and Margaret Wandby. This couple and their story add to the dark atmosphere of the novel; its world is one where perverse and shameful deeds and desires are revealed. Benjamin plays a crucial role in the narrative because he provides the reader with another perspective on the character of Dollbright: he is

described as Dollbright's 'closest watcher' (p.143), and as such witnesses the change in Dollbright's creed.

Benjamin is a sinister presence; he exists in the half-light and the shadows; he is not what he seems. His room is 'foggy and dingy...almost as if a brown stuffy mist had settled around everything' (p.144). When he enters Dollbright's dark house late in the evening:

> ...his feet and all his body up to the neck were hidden, but through the glass square above the door, the street lamp threw a long ray on the wall over which the shadow of his head, with its sharp nose and prickly beard, glided out of sight (p.144).

He has always inhabited the fringes of society; as a boy he recalls how he used to walk on stilts, whitening his face with flour, wearing a top hat and long cotton trousers, like a figure from a tale of the brothers Grimm, spying on people in the darkness through their upstairs windows. He sits on his bed kicking the wall; the monotonous action of his 'unquiet foot' (p.144) over twenty-seven years has left its mark on the wall, an outward sign of his tortured conscience. We learn that 'his nights were infected by his past more deeply even than his days' (p.144). Although he seems 'unimpassioned', 'calm' and 'contemplative' (p.145) during the day, this appearance is belied by his terrible cries and shouts in the night, as he falls prey to terrible dreams. He spends his days sitting by Dollbright's fireside watching the affairs of the household while polishing or dismantling clocks, an appropriate occupation for one whose life is dominated by his past. He is obsessed with the idea that the past inescapably haunts the present and the reader is slowly made aware that Benjamin's past contains a shameful secret which is gradually but never fully revealed to the reader.

A clue to this secret is conveyed in his journal account of a recurring nightmare. He dreams that he is in a small room trying to open a drawer in a desk. He is being watched by Dollbright who asks what he has done. He has the feeling in the dream that

he has cast Dollbright as his judge and if he could bring himself to confess to him then he would find peace, but he is too afraid to speak. He thinks he has woken up and seized some matches but they are snatched from him and the bed is crawling with hands like reptiles. At this point he wakes with a shudder but comforts himself with the knowledge that Dollbright does not know and that the table has been sold years ago. On waking he has a burning sensation in the tip of his finger as if he had pinched out a candle flame and he takes out his diary to read it. The last entry of the diary is quoted, in style very close to the anguished and self-dramatising entries in the author's own journals:

> 'Often, often and now, that most vivid and everlasting minute, when boiling with unnameable remorse, I have cried "perhaps what is in me will be born with this breath, perhaps now it will come out...And labouring, clumsy, fear-ridden as I am to the end, up to that very end, there is TIME"'(p.147).

Then he adds 'in wild swift writing':

> 'No. Terrible delusion of Time. Another nightmare. Saw one in the street, the first I have ever met since I was out. Chaos' (p.147).

The clock mender is preoccupied with Time: both time past, events returning to him in terrible dreams, and time in the future, an opportunity to confess to his self- appointed judge and so gain some peace. Putting down his diary, his record of time past, he enters his sister, Margaret's room, and in another reference to time's dominance we are told that he and his sister have 'lived before and after one fact' (p.148). It seems that, whatever has happened in the past, Margaret is frightened to death, almost literally, of her brother. Margaret appears to be only just alive: her eyes are 'vacant' (p.55); the clothes appear 'withered' on her body which appears concave lying on the mattress as under a heavy weight (p.148). Seeing her brother leaning over her bed is almost enough to break the thread by which she hangs on to life, 'She whispered: "Don't touch me. I'm going to die. My heart is stopping."' (p.149) He tells her that he is going to confess to Dollbright, that he cannot endure people not knowing what he has done; he would rather

risk eternal damnation. She feebly protests and their ensuing exchange refers obliquely to the cause of her fear:

> "The world's the prison, Margaret. If we could be made afresh and you were not my sister"....
>
> "Oh I am frightened! Don't touch me. I'm afraid to look at you."
>
> "Do you think I have come to...to---?"
>
> "It comes back to me, too. I never forget even when I'm asleep. Do you want to kill me? I feel as if I were dying. Didn't you come stealing in here tonight to murder me?"....
>
> "No; every no that's ever been said! I love you beyond all words" (pp.149-150).

Although it is not articulated, whatever has happened between this brother and sister is represented as perverse and unnatural and adds to the darkness of the novel's atmosphere. A further indication of the nature of Benjamin's sin comes when he happens upon Menna on her knees cleaning his room. Benjamin feels 'a glow of desire' as he watches her: 'He felt again the sensation of helpless attraction...the certainty of folly, and he shrank as he recalled the things that he had done' (p.181). This clearly indicates that Benjamin's problems have stemmed from inappropriate sexual desires. He takes hold of Menna who rebuffs him and demands an apology. He attempts to make light of the matter to Menna but he is left feeling foolish and desolate. Again he is troubled by memories, 'He felt accursed; his memory was foul like a pond which no fresh water purges, which was bottomed with slime. His slightest recollections were unpleasant; the greatest of them was terrible' (p.183). It is tempting to speculate that there are echoes of the author's life inscribed here in that she worried in her journal about whether others would regard her sexual relationship with Ruth Farr as perverse and unnatural.

When Benjamin's crime was discovered he denied it, so went unpunished; now he chooses Dollbright as his judge. He sees in Dollbright's unflinching certainty of right and wrong a 'cruel confessor' who can fulfil the task of being Benjamin's 'soul's judge' (p.151). Ironically, however, after all the years Benjamin has observed his implacable

landlord, he chooses to confess just at the time when Dollbright's creed has been challenged by circumstance and suffering and doubt have entered his mind. This means that although Dollbright regards his lodger with revulsion (p.58) and hatred (p.180), he now recognises in him a fellow sufferer. When Benjamin calls upon him to be his judge Dollbright replies, 'God is your judge'. But Benjamin has been watching and preparing for this confession for fifteen years and will not be diverted: '"Since when have *you* left that to Him? Archangel, do your duty...Twenty seven years ago I tried to murder my sister"' (p.186).

Dollbright's reaction indicates how much he has changed from the start of the novel: he forbids Benjamin ever to speak of it again and when Benjamin asks whether or not he will turn him out on to the street, he replies, 'A week, two days ago, yes I would. But not now. Where would you fit in half so well as you do here?' (pp.187-8). Dollbright, at the start of the novel, believed that God is 'our omnipotent judge' who would reward the good and punish the wicked (p.14), but his experiences have radically shaken his philosophy. Rather than sitting in judgement of his fellow men he aligns himself with the worst of criminals: one who has attempted sororicide.

> Weeks ago I thought my wife was well, my living good, and you a quiet man growing old. Now I hate my work, despise myself, my wife has cancer, you are a criminal, and I have been tempted to kill myself. God has hidden from me! Destruction is at the root of everything! (p.187)

Benjamin witnesses this alteration in Dollbright again at the end of the novel when he expects Dollbright to judge Menna harshly for spending the night with her lover, leaving her mother alone to meet with her fatal accident. Dollbright again refuses to sit in judgement, saying to Menna, '"...there's no blame here. It's your birthmark...we have ours"' (p.219).

Menna and Bellamy: Ambivalent bodies

Dollbright's moral and religious crisis is resolved by his interaction with the three other principal characters in the novel: his neighbours Menna Trouncer, her mother Gwen and Menna's suitor Bellamy Williams. These individuals are engaged in relationships, which are described as tortured, shot through with neediness and despair. Dollbright becomes entangled with them because they are neighbours and Bellamy's father is his colleague. The importance of this subplot lies in the exploration and representation, yet again, of inadequate mothering and how this contributes to misery in adult life. Thematically, the importance given to the mother-child bond ties in with, and comments upon, Florence's inability to be a mother and the cancer which attacks her breast.

We learn that Bellamy's mother died a month after his birth leaving him in the care of a foster mother while Menna's mother with whom she lives is a violent alcoholic. Bellamy is introduced to the reader as an 'aloof' young man with a cruel tongue (p.24). He appears unhappy and disturbed; the narrator diagnoses the cause: 'the shamed consciousness that he had never been anybody's baby was Bellamy's greatest trouble' (p.44). The effect this has on his relationship with Menna quickly becomes evident. Twenty years before Melanie Klein published her essay 'A Study of Envy and Gratitude' (1956), Evans uses images of feeding and nourishment to describe what Bellamy desires from Menna: 'I can't escape from hunger. And I can't help wanting to be fed.' Menna replies, 'Suppose I want to be fed too?' (p.37) Neither of the would-be lovers has received sufficient nourishment at the mother's breast, leaving both of them searching for that succour from another source. Both also express ambivalent feelings of love and hatred for the other. Their behaviour is consistent with the theories Melanie Klein applied in her therapeutic practice. She argues that the very young child's

experience of feeding either by breast or bottle affects the formation of identity and lays the foundation for future relationships:

> I have repeatedly put forward the hypothesis that the primal good object, the mother's breast, forms the core of the ego and vitally contributes to its growth and integration...The capacity to fully enjoy gratification at the breast forms the foundation for all later happiness[31].

If this is a negative experience where the baby often feels hungry or insecure then the baby will 'introject' the bad breast which means that it perceives both the mother and itself as bad. Such individuals can become confined as adults in what Klein refers to as the paranoid/schizoid position. This phase is characterised by persecutory anxiety against which the individual defends him/herself by adopting defence mechanisms, for example, projecting the bad feelings he/she has introjected onto others. Splitting is another defence mechanism which involves the baby unconsciously splitting itself in two and projecting the bad part onto something in the external world, initially the mother's breast. When an adult becomes fixed in this position, splitting and projection create a terrifying persecutory external world, dominated by primitive oppositions of love and hate or good and bad. The individual reacts to the feelings of anxiety and helplessness engendered in this situation by acting out phantasies of destruction designed to protect their own psychical survival. This may mean controlling or victimising a vulnerable individual who represents the split off part of the self.

In her therapeutic practice, Klein observed adult patients who continued to search in adult relationships for the care and succour they had missed as infants, sometimes unconsciously looking to the therapist to supply the mothering they had lacked. She remarks that 'in adults'

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[31] Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (First pub. 1975; repr. London: Virago, 1988), p.180.

> a full revival of the emotions felt during the earliest feeding experiences can come about in the transference situation. For instance, a feeling of hunger or thirst comes up very strongly during the session and has gone after the interpretation which was felt to have satisfied it....I have repeatedly heard the expression at the end of such a session, 'I have been well nourished'[32].

Language associated with feeding is repeatedly employed to describe Bellamy's passion for Menna. He is described as 'starved' and 'ravenous' (p.155); he presses his 'biting need into her flesh' (p.153). While Menna, for her part, recognises that he wants 'comfort' from her; in the next sentence she is described as a very beautiful young woman whose mouth is '*maternally* voluptuous' (my italics; p.153). They fight 'like tigers'; instinctively Menna feels the need to guard her breast from his touch because she realises that once he has laid his head there she will be caught (p.155). Like Easter in *Turf or Stone*, Bellamy wants to be mothered and Menna is aware that if she enters into a relationship with him she will be unable to escape and she will be forced into the maternal role, without the opportunity to have her own need for mothering satisfied.

Bellamy also conforms to Klein's description of someone who, as an adult, has failed to progress beyond the paranoid schizoid position. His feelings for Menna are violent and confused: 'I adore you, and I hate you too' (p.37). 'He adored her then he nearly hated her for denying him...The image of her roused him to hunger and a furious rage. He was obsessed. He worried her like a rag' (p.154). Bellamy grows more and more frantic and desperate:

> He knew he must have a woman, and because Menna wanted him near her yet would not marry him or take him in to her, he distrusted her, scorned her and bewitched her image into the demon of his visions... he hated something – himself, her (pp.195-6).

He expresses hatred of himself on other occasions (p.207), as well as a desire to kill himself and bury his own body (p.38).

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[32] Melanie Klein, 'A Study of Envy and Gratitude' (1956), in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.222.

In Kleinian terms this is the behaviour of someone who, because he remains in the paranoid schizoid position, has not learned to tolerate ambivalence in himself or others, including that it is possible to feel love and hatred for the same person. Instead, when his psychical survival seems imperilled because he feels anxious and vulnerable, he lays the blame elsewhere, significantly on the figure whom he is turning towards for maternal nurturing, obsessively trying to control her response to him: 'I *will* have you. You could love me and you shall' (p.32). When Bellamy and Menna finally consummate their relationship the mother/child parallel is again recalled: 'She stooped to him and laid him between her breasts, and loosed her love to go out to him' (p.214).

The description of the tempestuous and frantic nature of the love affair between Bellamy and Menna, which their neighbours see as 'a sort of fatal attraction mingled with tragedy' (p.152), echoes in language and tone the pages in the contemporary Journals where Evans records her similarly tortured relationship with Ruth Farr. Bellamy is so tortured by his feelings for Menna that he feels physically sick (pp.198-9). In an entry for 11th November 1935, Evans wrote addressing Ruth, 'My love, my love, my love! ....I love you, I am yours. You're mine. I don't <u>want</u> to be beside anyone else. My head is full of pains, my heart strangles me, I sweat and tremble and am tormented' [33]. Like Bellamy, Evans feels love mingled with hatred, 'God I hate something – myself – Ruth – it's all a mockery and an emptiness, <u>love</u>' (Nov. 14th 1935)[34]. For Evans, this is a love which brings pleasure but is also haunted by the fear that others will see it as 'wrong' (Dec.13th 1935)[35]. She tries to be defiant, 'I don't care whether Peggy Whistler is in the right or the wrong, good opinion or bad, so long as she pursues the saltiness in herself' (Oct. 10th 1935)[36]. That this is more difficult than she will admit emerges in the Journals and in the portrayal of a relationship which seems as

[33] NLW, MS 23577C, p.16.
[34] Ibid. p.18a.
[35] Ibid. p.27a.
[36] Ibid. p.13.

destructive and unfulfilling as it is necessary to the couple involved. Evans does not employ images of feeding in her description of her relationship with Ruth; she goes a step further and imagines their bodies merged, arguably reflecting the prenatal state when mother and child are one: 'I looked at her with utter terror as if she contained me and was going to be destroyed. The next moment I seemed to be filled with her. I could not tell of us two which was single' (Nov. 30th 1935)[37].

Interspersed with descriptions of Evans's feelings for Ruth are the entries giving the stark and terrible facts of the last few weeks of her father's life. The above quotation continues, 'And now I look at Dad lying in bed with his head inclined on the pillow: his bald dome, his forehead is like a Northern place'. The same day, a month before his death, she records how he called her and gave her the keys to his drawer so that she could remove the bottle of whisky he had been using 'to help him sleep in the night.' He tells her to take it away and put it in the medicine cupboard. Her brief comment says everything: 'I took it a lifetime too late'[38]. Again her novel provides a repository for some of her feelings about her father's illness: Menna's mother Gwen Trouncer, a dealer in second hand clothes, is an alcoholic, 'killing herself with whisky' (p.152).

The physical descriptions of Mrs Trouncer paint a grotesque picture. She is 'a gross woman with a glazed face and bilious eyes' (p.34). Evans's vision of her is dominated by the colour yellow distinctive of those who, like her father, are in a state of advanced liver failure: 'Tomorrow she would lie there still...her yellow gaze fixed on her ultimate terror – death' (p.38). Mrs Trouncer is also associated with dank, marshy, subterranean places; she is twice described as looking like a toad (pp.34 and 107); 'Her eyes floated like foul bubbles on her ghastly face' (p.168); 'Her lips stretched and revealed each separate decaying tooth in the yellow gums' (p.169); her flesh is

[37] Ibid. p.25a.
[38] NLW, MS 23577C, p.22a.

'mottled'. She is dirty, gross and repellent, but she exerts a strange power over both her daughter and her neighbour, Dollbright.

Evans's fictional depiction of the relationship between Menna and her mother vividly portrays the violent and complex emotions aroused when roles are reversed and a child is forced to nurture a parent who is intent on self destruction. Mrs Trouncer's love for her daughter is described as 'cruel and greedy', 'like teeth in the girl' (p.153). This image recalls a passage in *The Wooden Doctor* where Arabella describes her home as 'a cage of savagery'. Both images serve to vividly convey the effect of family love which turns brutal and destructive.

Like Godfrey Whistler, Mrs Trouncer is 'killing herself with whisky' (p.152) kept in a cupboard the key to which she kept about her person while Menna, like Evans herself, is simultaneously struggling to provide care for her parent while dealing with the demands of an importunate lover. In a climactic scene in the novel when Bellamy has been particularly frantic and desperate:

> ...love me...love me. I want the looks that you hide from me, the time that you spoil, all the joys that you kill and keep back. I want my sleep from you, my life, my rest...I want your hands on my head – it's all pain and longing! (p.159).

Mrs Trouncer intervenes by putting her fist through the window. Bellamy and Menna are forced to rescue her so that she will not bleed to death but she is a hideous sight; Bellamy is physically sickened by her and wishes her dead. The incident serves to illustrate to Menna the hopelessness of her position which she explains to Bellamy:

> I pray she'll die, and I don't care how. It's not my fault she's drinking, but it is that we're here together. I can't stop her, though I used to try – now let her kill herself, not me...not me (p.163).

She tells Bellamy that she feels responsible for her mother because she persuaded her, against her will, to move away from Salus where she was engaged in heavy drinking

sessions with her brother-in-law after her husband's death. They 'drank whisky by the pailful and hid it everywhere. I've found it under a stone in the yard' (p.164)[39]. Menna promised her mother that if she would move away she would stay with her and she feels bound by this promise even though she realises that her mother will kill herself and that she would even hasten her inevitable end. (p.164). The conflict between her mother and Bellamy's demands on her leave her distraught: 'She seemed to draw breath over a red hot bar in her breast. She stood in a rage of love. She trod agony' (p.166).

In her Journal for the weeks leading up to and following her father's death, Evans frequently uses similar language to describe her feelings: she speaks about having to drag herself 'from the agony' of her tempestuous feelings 'by my own words' (Jan. 20th 1936)[40]. Speaking of her unreciprocated passion for Basil Blackwell she accuses him of opening her up to her agony: 'If ever human being were tortured by the possessor lover, I am....I've been seized, twisted, made to glow with red fire!...I loved you and I thought you loved me but you don't' (Jan. 3rd 1936)[41].

Menna's desperation leads her to threaten her mother after she has been delivered back to the shop one evening, too drunk to stand: 'Suppose I set fire to *you*? You can't stop me...*you* can't move.' This frightens Mrs Trouncer so she takes to drinking only in her room with the door locked, but sometimes she calls to her daughter in the middle of the night: '"Menna, Menna, come to your Mammy! Fetch a light. I'm stuck...my tongue's gone down my gullet. You can't bury me...I'm not dead yet"'(p.170). At this point in her text, when the drunken parent calls for help from a

[39] NLW, MS 23577C, *Arabella's Voice*, p.14-14a; in a journal entry for Oct. 10th 1935, Evans relates a story told her by Mrs Maile, a neighbour, about a previous employer. This woman was a habitual drunk who kept bottles under her mattress and fell out of bed one night and broke her nose. 'She'd a pug nose and wore glasses. She said you ought to be sorry for me. She cried and laughed and said it was a disease. She'd bury bottles in the yard under a stone'.
[40] NLW, MS 23577C, p.41.
[41] Ibid. p.37a.

daughter, driven to hatred by her mother's alcoholism, Evans chooses to insert her own voice into the narrative:

> There are many, I know, who by this time will have picked up this book and put it down again. Having opened it, perhaps, read a page or two, they will pass their usual comment:
>
> 'Why write about such people?'
>
> I wish they would read to the end. Maybe they would find a line of their own likeness, though no one is in my mind as I draw it. I own that *I* am here (p.170).

This authorial comment confirms the close relationship between the fiction and the life; in her portrayal of Menna, her mother and her lover Evans is reflecting and working through the traumatic circumstances of her own life at the time of the novel's creation.

Dollbright's malignant double: body as sin made manifest

The grotesque figure of Mrs Trouncer dominates the novel and contributes to the sense of corruption, deviance and horror that pervades it. She evidently haunted her creator. In a Journal entry for September 1935, where Evans records her longing for Ruth and her fears that they will be parted which give rise to a feeling of chaos, she writes, 'Another nightmare. Note. Mrs Trouncer stirred in the corner like a resolution'[42]. Mrs Trouncer is killed in an accidental fall while Menna is away leaving her alone for the first time to spend the night with Bellamy. Menna's reaction to the death again shows the deep ambivalence felt by the child of a flawed parent. Hearing that her mother's last words were: '"I'm dying, I'm dying and I want somebody to love me,"' she screams, '"But I did!"' while a moment later confessing, '"I have killed her! Oh God, let her die, let her be dead now and I'll believe in right"' (p.218). Mrs Trouncer's life and death are shown to be devastating not only to her daughter, but to her neighbour, Dollbright.

[42] NLW, MS 23577C, p.12.

The first time Mrs Trouncer appears in the novel we are told that for Dollbright she is a 'deformed soul' who personifies the 'evil liver' and that 'her appearance fills him with an extreme, almost superstitious horror.' He is horrified because she is the embodiment of the sinner whose body, as described to Ifor Morriss at the beginning of the novel (pp.14-15), becomes coarse and bloated with decaying flesh and rotten bones. This explains his reaction when Florence tells him that she has asked Menna Trouncer to help out while she is in hospital: '"Oh, Florence, don't let us have any Trouncer here!" he cried in horror' (p.107). Less than an hour later Mrs Trouncer is banging on his door and he is 'griped [sic] with loathing. Was his wife's illness drawing this dank toad of a woman into his house?' (p.107). She is described as 'this most abhorred of his aversions' (p.107). Dollbright feels doubly persecuted; not only does he feel that his wife's illness is a punishment for his sins but now he is also confronted with sin made manifest in the hideous shape of this woman. Evans's description of her emphasises her overpowering physicality as she challenges Dollbright's faith. He notices her 'great sullen mouth'; her 'squat neck, rimed with dirt'; 'she rolled her thighs against the mangle, stroking her piston-like forearms' (p.108). Dollbright seems no match for sin in such a guise and indeed he feels himself drawn to her despite himself, 'Suddenly he felt an abominable seduction dwelling in her swarthy flesh' (p.108).

The description of this woman as abominable, seductive and swarthy is key to my reading of the relationship between Dollbright and Mrs Trouncer which could be compared to that which Gilbert and Gubar point to between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason[43]. They suggest that Bertha is 'Jane's truest and darkest double', her 'ferocious secret self' and that her most important encounter in the novel is not with Rochester but

[43] Annette R. Federico ed., *The Mad Woman in the Attic After Thirty Years* (Colombia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2009). In this book of essays, various writers point out the short-comings and omissions, as well as celebrating the significance, of Gilbert and Gubar's book. I feel that their analysis of the relationship between Jane and Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* remains cogent and is an interesting point of comparison for the current study.

with Bertha who represents her own imprisoned 'hunger, rebellion and rage'[44]. According to Claire Rosenfeld, 'the novelist who consciously or unconsciously exploits psychological Doubles' frequently juxtaposes 'two characters, the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalising the free, uninhibited often criminal self'[45]. Dollbright's strong feelings of repulsion and attraction to Mrs Trouncer may stem from the fact that she functions as his 'double' in the novel. In her his conventional self encounters his own imprisoned desire, doubt and sin. Rosenfeld also notes that 'when the passionate, uninhibited self is a woman, she more often than not is dark'[46]. Bertha Mason is the daughter of a Creole; Mrs Trouncer is described as 'swarthy' (p.108), her nose is 'nearly black' (p.109). The physical description of Bertha has other similarities with that of Mrs Trouncer. Jane describes Bertha as 'fearful and ghastly': 'I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments'[47]. Evidence that Evans was aware of the idea of the double exists in the contemporary Journal when in the middle of describing her father's drinking she says she feels haunted by a 'malignant double'. Lying in bed she has a horrible sensation that she has two heads, one of which pushes the other off the pillow: 'only in the displaced one is consciousness, thought, terror – the other is a malignant double mine yet uncontrolled by me' (Sept. 28th 1935)[48].

The many parallels between Bertha Rochester and Mrs Trouncer, along with Evans's enthusiasm for the works of the Brontë sisters, suggest that Bertha may have

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[44] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* 2nd edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.360.
[45] Claire Rosenfield, 'The Shadow Within: The Conscious and Unconscious Use of the Double', in Albert J. Guerard, ed., *Stories of the Double* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p.314.
[46] Rosenfield, p.314.
[47] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (First pub. 1847; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.320. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.
[48] NLW, MS 23577C, p.9a.

been part of Evans's inspiration for her character. Bertha, we learn, copied her mother in being both mad and a drunkard (p.321). Jane's reaction on first setting eyes on Bertha is to think that she is barely human, 'What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal' (p.321); Mrs Trouncer is described as 'more like a wild beast than a woman' (p.168). In the case of both Bertha and Mrs Trouncer, their bestiality is made manifest in violent behaviour, attacking or biting those who dare to approach them: Bertha worries Mr Mason 'like a tigress (p.241), while Mrs Trouncer threatens Bellamy, '"Keep your --- fingers off me or I'll bite 'em off"' (p.162). Both are also associated with fire. In an exchange which echoes the incident when Bertha sets light to her husband's bed curtains as he sleeps (p.179), Menna says to Bellamy, '"Do you know what she said to me? She said she'd rather put a light to me when I was asleep and burn me up than see me with you"' (p.164).

Most significantly, like Bertha, Mrs Trouncer appears at key moments in Dollbright's life. Unlike Jane, Dollbright has intimations of her significance for him. It is through his relationship with Mrs Trouncer that his attitude to God and religion, his creed is resolved. She embodies the religious doubts that he has repressed until now. Railing violently against him, Mrs Trouncer seems to grow in vitality and colour: '"Sodding churchwarden!...I'd stamp you down in Hell, where I've been and seen not one devil but ten thousand holding up their arms at the whole --- lot of us...Church bug – climb up the cross"' (pp.109-10). Simultaneously, Dollbright pales as if crucified: passionless, torpid, and confounded: 'All the heat in his blood seemed to have gone with her' (p.110). Her words flow strong and vehement, while he is left speechless, with 'no words to form his thoughts, nor images to hold them' because they are 'too vague' (p.111). The more powerful she seems to him the more he is diminished; Dollbright realises he is a 'swaddled ignoramus' before this woman's 'violent force':

> She made him ashamed of his religion, weary of it and distrustful...He hated her still, but he could think of her without the limitation of disgust. He ceased to curse himself for the abominable perversion of his desire. Self-blame was lost in an almost supernatural fear. He felt she was a giant figure in his destiny...she fated him (p.112).

Again the word 'abominable' is used in connection with the perverted desire he feels for this woman who embodies so hideously the opposite of everything he has represented in his public life. He sees her as the conduit through which an intimation of 'a new omnipotent idea of evil as a profound unearthly cause' (p.113) has passed to him.

By the end of Brontë's novel Jane Eyre has been freed twice by Bertha: firstly, her very existence causes Jane to gain her independence by separating from Mr Rochester, refusing to be his mistress and leaving to make her own way; secondly, her self-inflicted death by fire frees Jane to marry Mr Rochester. At the end of *Creed* there are two deaths: Mrs Trouncer's and Florence's. Dollbright discovers Mrs Trouncer, fatally injured after a fall down the cellar steps. He and Benjamin wait with the body for Menna to come home from Bellamy's house where she has spent the night. Dollbright is deeply affected by her death: 'She had crashed across his unchosen track like a lightning stricken tree whose shadow was consumed by fire and death. (p.232)' This image again echoes *Jane Eyre* in which the chestnut tree split in two by lightning in the orchard at Thornfield on the day of Jane and Rochester's engagement foreshadows the coming rift between the couple (p.285). For Dollbright, Mrs Trouncer has crashed into his life with similar portentous force:

> This was her act in his destiny. This was the power over him which he had felt with a supernatural shrinking from the inevitable demonism of her eye, the demoniacal authority of her wild, half-hinted speech, which was subterraneously linked to the breaking out of his own fierce ungoverned spirit (p.232).

He recalls how, while sitting with Mrs Trouncer's body, he had felt 'a great opening in his mind as though air was rushing into a vacuum, but faced with the reality of death he

had been unable to understand the consequences. The day after he feels ecstatic, 'the knots in his breast relaxed in a rushing thaw'. He is 'possessed by freedom' (p.233), freedom from the strict, judgemental creed which has dominated his life and relationships. He is in this state when, in the final paragraph of the novel, he hears from Benjamin the news of Florence's death. His response illustrates his new freedom, '"Dead, dead?" he echoed like a foreign word. He was free of death' (p.234). Dollbright's words echo those of Jane after she has passionately defended herself to her Aunt Reed: '...my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty' (p.69). Gilbert and Gubar describe *Jane Eyre* as a novel of enclosure and escape; Dollbright, at the end of *Creed* has escaped from the influence of his strict, enclosing creed.

The Book: Imagery

Although the narrative of *Creed* often seems jerky and fragmented it achieves a degree of unity both through its concentration on the story of a soul and through its tone and imagery. In keeping with the religious theme many of the images involve light and darkness. Dollbright is constantly struggling against being overwhelmed by the dark as his creed is progressively challenged, and he is often shown lighting candles or lanterns in order to combat its encroachment. Ifor Morriss associates light with divine revelation and darkness with human blindness to God's mysteries. He perceives in Dollbright someone who is mired in darkness and who cannot perceive God's goodness and mercy, represented by light. Faced with Dollbright's vision of the sinner, Morriss observes, '"You speak through a shadow...And the images of your damned thoughts blacken your forehead"'. He concludes:

> Mr Dollbright you aren't aware of the power of good; you over-estimate the power of evil. I cannot understand why God has given us light and withdrawn it, honoured us with vision and limited it. The world is dark with the feebleness of our sight (p.16).

Dollbright lights a candle after Mrs Trouncer has vehemently attacked him as a 'church-bug'. But the light does not offer revelation and comfort; instead it seems only to threaten by illuminating his own thoughts. 'The light now glittered in the corner of his eye, harassing him; it seemed to flow from his own brain, and streaming inwards, too, revealed the strong disruption there (p.110). He wishes he was back in the dark, which represents death, the final oblivion: 'Oh, why did his heart keep on beating, and, why didn't light go out before his eyes?' (p.111).

Darkness threatens to overwhelm Dollbright when he learns that his wife's tumour is malignant. His horror at this is conveyed first of all by his perception that light is distorted, 'the mottled sunlight changed to an unblotted red'; the sun is 'congealed' (p.125). He goes home where his lodger, Benjamin, finds him sitting at the foot of the attic stairs, 'ghostily beyond the scoop of light' (p.127). Dollbright feels that the darkness is 'full of derision' and he wants to die (p.127). His 'consciousness' has settled unshakably on his wife's cancer but although he wants to keep her at the forefront of his consideration his own pain keeps intervening. He realises that to opt for the darkness of death, leaving Florence to suffer alone, would be selfish and egotistical but he yearns for darkness and oblivion: 'Oh for dead, blind sleep, years, seasons of it, to suck and not restore the strength to rear pangs and rages!' (p.129).

Dollbright feels drawn towards death again later in the novel. While walking by the river he stumbles into a barn where a loft with a trap door offers a 'design for death' (p.175), which will free him from his terror. He is tempted to hang himself and 'swing above the dark until the morning' (p.176). As he ponders this, the dark closes in until it is impossible to distinguish his figure in the barn: 'He might have been hanging. Or

tying the rope. Or breaking his vow and praying before he jumped. Or covering his eyes' (p.176). He is interrupted by a man entering the barn and lighting a lantern. This breaks Dollbright's reverie and he flees from the barn, because it is the scene of 'a dreadful impulse which had burst outside his brain without harming him, but settled on the hillside to wait' (p.177). The impulse is the wish for death which Dollbright feels is pursuing him. He runs, terrified, and his terror is again linked to darkness:

> It was a long time since darkness had come upon him in the open, and the walls of his mind were razed. In the streets it was more sudden and precipitate, a black waterfall in the gorge....But here it was so gradual and remorseless, a drowning in blindness. He felt that he was running down an open throat....Now when he looked back he saw nothing but an entire blackness out of which he had come. It was incredible that he had been *there* alone and not gone mad with terror (pp.177-8).

The reason for his terror, for his wish for death is fear, 'the utmost ghastliness of which' (p.179), he realises, is less terrible than to die without faith.

The images Evans uses to convey complete darkness are striking: 'like running down an open throat' conveys the terrifying idea of being swallowed by darkness. Elsewhere Dollbright feels the night 'built round him like a shaft'. The darkness is tangible; whenever he moves his limbs he feels that they touch the surface of the darkness. Sometimes the darkness is replaced by an unhealthy and sinister yellow glow: 'a yellowish haze of lighting' hangs above the town (p.22*)* and buildings are constructed of sulphur-coloured brick (p.49). Characters' skin sometimes takes on the same bloodless tinge: the yellow hands of one character are described and Florence's illness makes her face appear yellow and waxy (p.71). Fittingly, on the day of Florence's operation the sun shines above 'oily yellow clouds' and Dollbright's mind is filled with 'the image of death' (p.124).

Death is omnipresent in this novel; not only does it dominate Dollbright's thinking, it overshadows the lives of all the main characters. Florence falls mortally ill and the novel ends with her death; Mrs Trouncer falls to her death; Margaret Wandby,

Benjamin's sister, has been the victim of an attempted murder and now looks forward to 'dying quietly' so much so that she asks her brother to 'choke' her (p.150). Benjamin, who has tried to murder his sister, now feels that he is close to death. Dollbright contemplates suicide (p.175); Bellamy (p.208) and Menna (p.211) both see death as the only release from their suffering. Nonetheless, the novel ends, as I've noted above, with Dollbright feeling free from the power of the word. For many of the characters the longing for death seems to conform to the Freudian conception of the death wish as a longing to return to a pre-animate state where the ego can no longer be injured[49]. In Dollbright we can see the destructiveness of the Freudian death wish directed towards the self and manifest in his self-reproach, self-hatred and guilt. At the end he is free of this: perhaps he feels the retreat of the death wish, because no longer fearing God's judgement, death no longer has the same significance. Having lost his faith, it is simply a natural ending.

The Uncanny in *Creed*

It could be argued that the drive towards death and its pervasive presence in the text contributes to the sense that *Creed* is a novel which produces an uncanny effect on its readers. According to Freud, 'the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what is known of old and long familiar'[50]. Death is at once both familiar and absolutely unfamiliar and unimaginable. Freud acknowledges that for many people the 'acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts'[51]. Characters appear uncanny in a passage in which Benjamin reflects on himself and the other occupants of 'this overcast resentful house':

[49] Sigmund Freud, *SE* XXII,I *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), p.148.
[50] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (First pub. 1919; repr. London: Penguin, 2003), p.124.
[51] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.148.

> The three inhabitants, Dollbright, himself and Margaret moved, sat, united and separated in almost pause-less silence, each staring inward, wide as wind, at their own row of reckonings. It seemed as if their slow feet left mouldy tracks and they were less living than returning to death (p.189).

The effect of this passage is uncanny in that the borderline between life and death seems blurred in these three individuals. The metaphor of the 'mouldy tracks' left by their footprints associates them with decay and the grave; they are barely alive. Freud quotes Jentsch's work on the uncanny in which he suggests that the uncanny is present in the 'doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive and conversely whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate'[52]. This portrayal of Dollbright, Margaret and Benjamin renders them uncanny because they appear so still and so silent as to cause an observer to doubt whether they are in fact sentient beings. Nicholas Royle suggests that the uncanny is to be found 'in the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness'[53]. This reflects the situation of these three characters as they sit together but separated in the silence of their own thoughts.

In this scene the three characters seem almost ghostly, belonging to death rather than life. According to Royle 'it is impossible to conceive of the uncanny without a sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all the assurances about the identity of a self'[54]. At the point when Dollbright is seeking to come to terms with the fact of his wife's cancer he is described as 'sitting ghostily beyond the scoop of light' (p.127). The reality of his wife's illness brings on a paranoia in which Dollbright feels the floor beneath him swaying 'deliriously'; he perceives the darkness as 'full of derision'. His sense of self is threatened because although he feels separated from everything except the 'terrible reality of self' (p.128), that self feels 'sore, worn, collapsing' (p.129). Florence herself appears ghostly on the drive home from hospital:

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[52] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.135.
[53] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.2.
[54] Royle, p.16.

'Florence's face was reflected in the black patch on the glass made by the driver's back. It looked terrible, ghostly, as though the light were eating it away' (p.191). Here Evans effectively conveys the sense that Florence is fading into darkness; even her reflection is threatened by the light. The uncanny effect of the novel derives from the sense that many characters inhabit a borderland between life and death, but are drawn towards death; Bellamy, Menna and Dollbright all contemplate securing this fate for themselves.

Dollbright's experience through the course of the novel is uncanny in that the landscape of his life - his beliefs and his relationships - are rendered unfamiliar by his experiences. He is often described as fearful (pp.136, 177, 179) and this fear emanates from his sense of estrangement from all that has been familiar in his life. He is repeatedly shown lighting candles in an effort to illuminate the metaphorical darkness which threatens to overwhelm him by rendering the familiar invisible. Even when it is light Dollbright's view is often compromised by windows which are 'murky' (pp.189-90), 'black like ice' (p.209) or covered in snow (p.231), thus acting as both physical barriers separating him from others and obscuring his perceptions, making known objects seem faint and ghostly.

Dollbright's simultaneous feelings of repulsion and attraction for Mrs Trouncer, whom I have suggested can be read as his double, also add to the sense of the uncanny. Royle suggests that the uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter: it is perhaps inseparable from an apprehension that something that should have remained secret and hidden has come to light[55]. In this case, Dollbright's secret encounter is with the dark, repressed side of himself represented by the grotesque figure of Mrs Trouncer, the dealer in second hand clothes.

Menna and Mrs Trouncer conduct their business from a house 'of awful sights and shades which might stain the walls with the filmy silhouettes of appalling postures

[55] Royle, p.2.

and deathly collapses' (p.39). According to Freud, 'an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred'[56]. Here the shadows of grotesque postures and collapses might gain sufficient substance to actually stain the walls. They are both tangible and intangible. Menna and Mrs Trouncer's shop is hung around with coats and dresses which ape the shape of their previous owners. They appear almost human, but are simulacra. Looking through the Trouncers' shop window Dollbright sees 'the row of boots all with their tongues hanging out, and the clothes-hangers like bones, poking through the flimsy dresses' (p.114). The boundary between inanimate clothes and living creatures is deliberately blurred by this imagery.

Often Evans achieves an uncanny effect by ascribing human characteristics to inanimate things: on the climactic day after Mrs Trouncer's death and just before he hears that his wife has also died, the whole town seems muffled and dead. It is so dark that lamps are lit by two o'clock and burn like candles 'in a crypt' fitfully illuminating the buildings, 'Here and there the vertical line of a building defined left and right and stood up as vertebrae in the boneless air' (p.227). The buildings seem like skeletons entombed in the crypt like street. Sometimes the opposite happens and humans are robbed of the characteristics that make them human: Dollbright's face after he has lost the certainty of his creed is compared with a landscape that has been rocked by an earthquake or a landslide and has reached a point of absolute stillness (p.143). The narrator reflects that what makes a dead man seem so still, 'so preternaturally motionless', is the contrast with his movements when alive, '...yet his form, his contours, and his look are at least a twin's likeness. That likeness is the difference – the difference between air and vacuum' (p.143). The difference between air and a vacuum is indiscernible but absolute as is the difference between a living body and a corpse.

[56] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.150.

Evans returns to this image in the closing paragraphs of the novel. For a long time Dollbright has thought of nothing, has 'suffered the terrible nothing in his breast and his brain' (p.233). But the previous night, holding Mrs Trouncer's lifeless body, 'he had felt a great opening in his mind as though air were rushing into a vacuum' (p.233). The revelation that her death brings him is that he is free of God, so that when Benjamin brings news of Florence's death the word no longer has any power over him, 'he was free of death' (p.234). Although these words close the novel, there is a suggestion that Dollbright might be mistaken in his self-analysis. Images of light and darkness pervade the novel; in the final scene, 'It grew dusky with a white, blind twilight, like the film of a cataract' (p.234). In this light, everything may not be what it seems; Dollbright's view is obscured in the 'blind twilight' and the truth may still be hidden from him.

Creed as a Modernist novel

Many of the uncanny effects discussed above simultaneously derive from and produce the sense of uncertainty that lies at the heart of the novel's narrative and themes. This uncertainty coupled with the fact that it arises from Dollbright's progressive lack of faith in his religious creed sets the text within the Modernist tradition. The novel's design strengthens this impression. In common with her earlier novels Evans provided a frontispiece illustration for *Creed* together with a design which appears both on the title page and the spine of the first edition[57]. On the title page is a bold, spare, abstract line drawing of the skyline of Evans's fictional town, Chepsford. It shows the dominant features of the town: the gasworks and the mill chimney, which thrusts defiantly skywards. On the title page this illustration appears in stark black, while on the spine it is a bold red which stands out against the buff- coloured weave of

[57] See Appendix.

the cover. This clearly indicates the setting of the narrative, which, unlike the earlier novels, will be urban and industrial.

The frontispiece is also black and white and shows the profile of a figure set against grey shaded rays. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan sees the figure as a labourer but the dominant feature of the figure, occupying the centre of the drawing, is a strong forearm, its fist clenched either around or towards an object[58]. This object is indistinct: it could be a machine part, but it could equally be the silhouette of a prostrate human form. I suggest that the illustration is Evans's visual representation of the central struggle in her novel: that between Dollbright and his God. The front of the large figure is obscured by boldly accomplished dark circles, which look as if they have been drawn with energy and passion. The thick black shading echoes the imagery which is dominated by Dollbright's constant fear of being overwhelmed by spiritual darkness. Evans herself said that *Creed* was the story of Job; her illustration could be seen as an interpretation of the problem at the heart of Job's story: why an all-powerful God allows good people to suffer.

The style of the illustrations recalls the work of contemporary artists, such as Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash and Ben Nicholson. The setting also reflects Modernist interest in the city and its impact on the individual. According to Raymond Williams, the shift to the metropolis in Modernist fiction records 'elements of strangeness and distance, indeed of alienation, central to urban experience'[59]. This has already been noted in the discussion of the uncanny in *Creed*; it is reinforced in the isolation of the characters from each other and in the descriptions of their environment. Apart from the named characters the rest of the population of Mill End is seen as a mass of workers in thrall to the 'troll of the Mill' (p.167). As day breaks and the Mill wheels start to grind,

[58] Lloyd-Morgan, p.62.
[59] Raymond Williams, 'The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism', rpt. in Peter Brooker (ed.), *Modernism/Postmodernism* (London: Longman, 1992), p.91.

men are forced to bind 'their vague proportions within hard outlines' (p.167). They lose their natural, vague shapes and individual identities and are coerced into adopting the hard, anonymous outline of the mill worker. The industrial buildings are also seen as unnatural:

> The unnatural, unworn shapes of the gas works, the mill and the brewery cut into the yellowish haze of lighting which hung above the town. Directly sun, wind and rain bent their strength on these forged masses, men repaired and replaced them with sharp new outlines. They belonged to nothing but ingenuity, strange and disturbing idols which served human purposes as gods must serve (p.22).

Nothing about this landscape is natural; even the light is polluted by street lamps. The mill and the brewery and the gasworks are paradoxically idols to be placated, and the servants of 'human purposes'. Evans suggests that living in these conditions is corrupting, forcing men to perform depraved and violent deeds:

> Down those steps a maddened lorry driver flung his wife, breaking both her legs; from this door a brawl started which finished half a mile away with one man hammering another's skull upon the pavement; over this squalid pub, reeking, ill-lit, two brothers fought, and one died, for its possession (p.22).

It is a picture of chaos and disorder, which is further reflected in the suicidal thoughts, criminal acts and violent deaths of the main protagonists.

In my chapters on the earlier novels I have demonstrated how deeply Evans implicates herself in her texts. *Creed* was her last published novel. Despite one or two failed attempts to re-engage with the genre, it is perhaps unsurprising that her later published prose work, apart from a volume of short stories, is autobiographical. In *Creed* she is present in her text both implicitly, as I have shown, and explicitly. As in *The Wooden Doctor* she cannot resist addressing her reader directly in a number of interventions in the narrative itself and in a Preface. The tone of the interventions is often defensive, sometimes playful: having described the inhabitants of Chepsford as 'wild, vehement, laughing' (p.22), unlike any other people in England, she continues

'unbelievable as they are to these civil gentlemen in collars and – never mind. I speak the truth, but the gentlemen will not be convinced (p.23)'. She looks forward to a time when she will please these gentlemen more by writing about the 'country and its quaint customs.... That will please them' (p.23):

> And I shall be enriched by their pedantic pleasure to such a degree of tin-wheeled liberty that the world itself will be no more to me than an unloved province, and belief shrink to the length of my sight - which is short (p.23).

Evans's ironical communication with the gentlemen of the literary establishment continues at the beginning of Chapter 3 when she invites them to leave 'sordid brutal Mill End' for Lindenfield, the wealthy residential district (p.60), where Florence goes to consult 'an Irish doctor of whom I have written before' (p.60). Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan refers to this as 'an assured and glorious use of intertextuality before the term was invented' (p.65) because this can be none other than Dr Dunlop, the central character from Evans's earlier novel. It also reinforces the uncanny effect of the novel bringing as it does a sense of déjà vu for those familiar with Evans's writing. In this intervention, Evans also draws attention to herself in the act of writing the novel: 'Now for some style!' and 'It's only fair that I allot it [Lindenfield] a few words of description' (p.60). A few pages further on, Evans describes Dollbright lying in bed next to his sleeping wife. His heart is uplifted by the sound of wild swans flying over the house while next to him Florence's heart is 'feeding the frightful crab' (p.73). The juxtaposition of the two prompts the author to break off her narrative again to ponder what this might mean:

> Not in mystery. Not in perfect reason. Not in faith. After all, the most lucid revelation of God in us – is doubt. This is an odd way to tell a story – a bad way. It splutters like a lamp with water in the oil. Yet...Not long ago I saw a man with a twisted leg, who moved along in half circles. He must have seen more than most people...And supposing a man were set for an hour or more upon a slowly revolving wheel, he would come away from that circular path advanced in perception, if not in passage.
>
> However, it *is* time to go forward (p.73).

Having conveyed to her readers her conviction about the religious significance of doubt she goes on to acknowledge that her narrative does not flow smoothly, its pace is not even; it falters unpredictably like a spluttering flame. The justification she offers is that like the man with the twisted leg compelled to move in half circles, the shape of her narrative allows more opportunity for perception and reflection. In the contemporary journal Evans confesses that she is finding the writing of her new book difficult (Nov. 14th 1935)[60]. When it is finally finished she refers to it as 'my cursed book' (Jan. 20th 1936)[61]. It is possible that the source of her difficulty was that she was simultaneously unable to omit her personal reflections while being aware of the way they compromised her narrative.

Despite her statement that 'it *is* time to go forward' the very next two paragraphs which end Chapter 3 bring the reader back to the writer at her window, craving silence on a Saturday night when the street outside is crowded with noisy people and traffic:

> I shut the door and go to the table. Downstairs a door slams repeatedly, and the floor shakes each time. There's an endless drip of disconnected conversation and harsh laughter, which frets me like a fever. I feel a useless energy. I am thirsty and confused (p.74).

The insistent presence of the author, what she can see, hear, how she feels, distracts the reader and destabilises her text. She reappears towards the end of the novel where she again draws attention to her difficulties as the creator of the text: 'The last chapter, the drawing of conclusion around one like a robe, how difficult it is!' (p.191). It could be argued that the absence of the stabilising presence of an omniscient author from early twentieth century fiction perhaps mirrors loss of faith in an omniscient deity. In *Creed* the author, by alternately distancing herself and then rendering herself vividly present in the text, calls attention both to its construction and to her interpretation of its meaning.

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[60] NLW, MS 23577C, p.17a; 18.
[61] Ibid. p.41.

The result is that the form of the narrative mirrors its subject: religious uncertainty and doubt.

Evans's insistence that she is in the narrative - 'I own that *I* am here' - (p.170) and her authorial interventions serve to foreground the author as a 'real' presence in the novel. This has the effect of emphasising the artificial nature of any realism in her narrative while simultaneously encouraging readers to make links between her text and their experience: 'Maybe they would find a line of their own likeness' (p.170). Ideas about the task of the author and her relationship with her writing, with time and 'reality', were occupying her thoughts while writing the novel as is evidenced in her Preface. By offering these thoughts to her readers she clearly demonstrates both her desire to engage in contemporary debates and calls attention to preoccupations which will resurface in her writing for the rest of her life.

The Preface begins with an invitation to observe her as she starts to work on the novel and an insight into her methodology: 'I begin to write, relying on the force and fine sense of each moment. That will be my strength.' The language she uses here recalls Woolf's perception of the significance for the writer of 'moments of being'[62] in which an individual receives 'a token of some real thing behind appearances'[63]. Evans believes that something of this nature, some 'fine sense', will inform her text. She continues:

> Nobody has ever seen any complete thing instantaneously. Such vision would mean a pause, which there is not. All we see is one thing moving upon another. And in trying to render them, we rely too much on juxtaposition for their fidelity, and the reality of each separate point. That may be order; it is not creation.

Evans's meaning here is unclear. The logic of what she seems to be saying is that true creativity is impossible because the nature of time prevents the individual from stopping

[62] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, Introduced and Revised by Hermione Lee (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.83.
[63] Woolf, p.85.

and observing anything completely. The individual can only gain a passing impression as time hurries on; the writer can only describe whatever is seen in relation to the other events, people, objects which surround it. This is what she refers to as 'order' rather than 'creation'. Her perception here bears some resemblance to that of Henri Bergson, the philosopher of time and space whose ideas were very influential in the early twentieth century. In *Creative Evolution* he warns that 'instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things...we take snapshots, as it were of the passing reality...perception, intellection, language...set going a kind of cinematograph inside us'[64]. Bergson argues that our impressions of reality are like freeze frame images which, put together as in a film, give an impression of reality. Evans goes on to give an example of this idea:

> A long time ago I went with an artist to look at an exhibition of pastels. I have forgotten all the pictures except one. It was not beautiful, not odd, not original. The subject was a boat lying silkily on a calm lake. But the boat *floated*: it was united with the water, not joined to it. That was reality.

She obviously felt that the artist had somehow captured the essence of the boat, even though this does not make the picture either beautiful or original. In *Creed* there are many examples of startlingly visual images that have an almost cinematographic effect, for example, 'The sky was the colour of trampled snow and hung over the town like a cloth weighted with stones' (p.227) or Bellamy Williams, 'looking through the small-paned window which was green in the corners to see if Menna were there. Across a row of shoes and between a red hat and a silver sequined dress, he saw her drooping profile' (p.35). It is perhaps significant that the example given in the Preface is from visual art rather than literature as Evans remained unhappy with her ability to capture the moment; indeed, this is one of the principal themes of her next published text, *Autobiography*.

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[64] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (First pub 1907; repr. London: Macmillan,1911), pp.322-3.

Evans's conviction that her writing fails, despite her efforts, to capture reality is reinforced by the next section of her Preface in which she goes on to assert:

> The reality of my manuscript is myself translating what I have learned into scribbled words on thin paper, pinned together with ordinary pins from a pink card, while the early day shines through the blind, as through an eggshell, and the dog in the stable raves at the chink of dawn under the door.

The 'reality' of her manuscript centres on herself translating her experience into words. The text itself is denigrated as 'scribble', a word she often uses in her journals to refer to her writing. On 10th December 1935 while simultaneously nursing her dying father and trying to complete her novel she wrote in her journal, 'Any scribble to release me from absolute physical life and physical effort' [65]. Writing, even scribbling, is for her an escape from the intensely physical dramas of her father's mortal illness and her tempestuous love affair with Ruth but she incorporates elements of the physical reality of her everyday life into her text in Mrs Trouncer's drunkenness, in Florence's disease and death and in the fraught, unhappy relationships depicted in the novel.

The specificity of the detail, the thin paper, the pins from the pink card, and the precise quality of the light shining through the blind as through an eggshell draw the reader into Evans's reality. The text is insubstantial and flimsy compared with its author who is centre stage. The final sentence of the Preface further conflates author and text: 'What I offer you as reading is real, though I outstrip each page and at the end am different.' Evans suggests that what the reader will access as real in her text is herself and that self will have continually changed through her experience of writing it. This is an extension of the idea found also in *The Wooden Doctor* that the text is performative: by creating the text, she is creating herself as an author. This is the transformation that the novel will effect.

[65] NLW, MS 23577C, p.26a.

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Autobiography and Pathography: *Autobiography; A Ray of Darkness* and *The Nightingale Silenced*

For seven years after the publication of *Creed* (1936), there were no more published texts until *Autobiography* appeared in 1943. When Derek Savage commented on this silence Evans defended herself saying that domestic duties had prevented her from finishing her next novel, *The Widower's Tale*, for which Blackwell had paid an advance[1]. In fact, Evans continued to struggle with this text for the rest of her life; there are several fragments in the archive and passages appear interspersed with her journals of the 1950s, but it was never finished.

From 1936-39, Evans solved the problem of earning a living by opening a guesthouse, Springherne, on the border near Ross-on-Wye, with her sister, Nancy, and Basil Blackwell's daughter Helen. Ruth Farr was a frequent visitor to Springherne, as was Michael Williams, the son of the Welsh speaking vicar of a nearby border parish, the Reverend Thomas Mendus Williams. Evans validated her Welsh pseudonym by marrying Mike in 1940; they settled at Potacre, five miles from Ross-on-Wye and three miles from the border. After Mike was called up to serve in the navy, Evans was kept busy in her house and garden where she grew vegetables and kept bees; she also undertook casual work on neighbouring farms. Despite being intensely occupied with physical work, she continued to write; there are hundreds of letters to Mike in the archive which recount the details of her daily life, anecdotes about their neighbours and pets and observations of the changing seasons. She also continued to write a

[1] NLW, MSS 24-26; 27.

journal and much of her next published work, *Autobiography,* which she offered to Blackwell in lieu of *The Widower's Tale*, is derived from these journals.

Following the publication of *Autobiography*, she produced a volume of poems, *Poems from Obscurity* (1947) and a collection of short stories, *The Old and the Young* (1948). During these years, some of the stories as well as occasional essays appeared in *The Welsh Review* and *Life and Letters Today.* She was still obliged to fit her writing around her busy domestic life and this accounts for her concentration on short forms: poems, essays and short stories. In *A Ray of Darkness* she blames herself for failing to allow her writing to take precedence over her domestic duties.

This chapter is concerned with Evans's two published autobiographical texts: *Autobiography* (1943) and *A Ray of Darkness* (1952), and the latter's unpublished sequel, *The Nightingale Silenced* (1954-5)[2]. *The Nightingale Silenced* exists in several drafts and was never prepared for publication. For this reason, I have used quotations from these drafts to reinforce and illuminate aspects of *A Ray of Darkness*, rather than offering a separate analysis of *A Nightingale Silenced.*

I have already examined in detail how Evans implicated herself in the four texts she offers as fiction, now she turns explicitly to autobiography. However, Evans's *Autobiography* does not follow the traditional trajectory of the genre; it is not the chronological story of her life. Instead, in a formal experiment which has affinities with the spirit of Modernism, she offers thirteen sections largely based on journals written over the period 1939-43. It is autobiographical because it tells another story of the self, this time an identity which is that of the nature mystic articulating her sense of oneness with the

[2] Margiad Evans, NLW MS 23367B and MS 23368B.

natural world; she describes 'this autobiography' in her conclusion to the text as 'the record of my gravest (that is happiest) inner existence'[3] (*A* p.150).

In her early novels, Evans used fictional constructs to explore identity in terms, among other things, of nationality and gender. In *Autobiography*, she articulates her sense that in her communion with the natural world she has found her true identity and she attributes this in part to her relationship with her husband: 'Living with M- has let me find myself entirely. Let me go back, never I hope to be lost again, in that blind crowding' (*A* p.81). By 'going back' she means recovering her childhood affinity with nature which Michael has unlocked because he is a kindred spirit: 'To go with him into the fields is to see further than my own sight, and to understand without effort from within' (*A* p.92). Furthermore, marriage to Michael Williams at least superficially resolved some of the issues affecting her identity, notably those of nationality: she became Welsh by marriage; and gender: she had opted for the conventional role of wife.

Evans's failure to complete a fifth novel at this point might be explained by referring back to the conclusion of *Creed*. There is a clear sense of freedom at the end of this novel. The death of the alcoholic Mrs Trouncer, a scene written while Evans's own father was dying, is the culmination of a series of experiences which liberate Dollbright from his strict moralistic creed and, therefore, his fear of death and judgement; he feels 'possessed by freedom'[4]. It is possible that Evans experienced a similar sense of freedom after the death of a father whose alcoholic ravings had dominated her adolescence. Like Dollbright, she does not feel trammelled by conventional, patriarchal Christianity. These

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[3] Margiad Evans, *Autobiography* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1943), p.150. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text (*A*).
[4] Margiad Evans, *Creed* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), p.233.

freedoms perhaps allowed her to move on from the practice of exploring her identity through fictional projections, turning inward instead to autobiography and the exploration of her identity as nature mystic.

The self continues to evolve when illness strikes and autobiography gives way to pathography. Clearly, Evans saw the three texts discussed in this chapter as linked: in *A Ray of Darkness* she makes many references to *Autobiography* published nine years earlier, remarking that the later work is a continuation of the first. She opens *The Nightingale Silenced* with a reference to *A Ray of Darkness:*

> One month ago the major epilepsy which follows me and which I tried to describe in A Ray of Darkness, deepened. It became acute. I am now going to begin the attempt to describe what happened...from the only desire that seems to be left in me in my apathetic weakness, the desire to put into physicians' hands a book[5].

In this chapter, I will analyse these texts to show how closely writing and the body are linked in her perception and how essential this insight is to her identity. By comparing the texts, it will be possible to trace how this idea develops both before and after her body becomes subject to a neurological condition which, on occasions, catastrophically severs the link between body and brain.

Autobiography: communion between body and earth

In *Autobiography*, the author had two main preoccupations: the relationship between her embodied self and nature and the difficulty of what she later describes in *A Ray of Darkness* as 'the continuous effort to put into

[5] NLW, MS 23368B, p.1.

language what was in reality a deeply relaxing experience'[6]. What emerges in *Autobiography* is her perception that her body and nature are inseparable:

> I'm tired, but the touch of the ground heals my hand...I can be the field, the trees – the movement of the branches in the breeze is like my own blood going through and round my life centre – the earth is the lung by which I breathe – the earth is my greater flesh (*A* p.88)

And, 'I see and contain the muscular growth of the hawthorn and the descent of the plover' (*A* p.119). The earth contains her and her body encompasses the earth: the hawthorn's growth is 'muscular'; the breeze is like the circulation of her blood; the earth is her lung – essential to breathing and life. Her connection with the earth revitalises her; it has the power to heal. But it is not only her body which is intimately tied to the earth, her thoughts and feelings are also reflected back to her by her environment, 'I saw an outward resemblance to my thoughts in the clammy ground, blear hedgerows and foggy trees whose faint colour was the blue of veins' (*A* p.33). Here the landscape reflects her thoughts, which are vague and melancholic, but the image also suggests the reciprocity between animate and inanimate: the trees have the bluish tinge of veins. At times the connection is so strong that her perception is of the external becoming absorbed into her very being, constituting her thoughts, 'I feel all that I see, entering and becoming part of my existence – the shape, the colour – the black ivy trails, the wild strawberry flower' (*A* p.86). Her communion with the natural world brings a sense that her body is entirely constituted of thoughts and feelings: 'To stand outside in the warmth, to breathe and look was to feel the body made of thought' (*A* p.52), and:

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[6] Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness* (London: Arthur Baker, 1952; repr. London: John Calder, 1978), p.66.
Further references to the John Calder edition are given after quotations in the text (*RD*).

> Shutting my eyes I became the thought of what I had seen. Not a part of my body but had its brain...the brain is the earth, the body is the universe, strung planet to planet by impalpable communicating threads (*A* p.101).

Her sense of unity with the earth can be described as that of the 'nature mystic' in the tradition of Henry Thoreau and Richard Jefferies, both of whose writing she admired.

William James refers to Thoreau and Jefferies as 'naturalistic pantheists' who have in common a mystical sense of 'enlargement, union and emancipation' inspired by their response to nature[7]. In his lecture on Mysticism, James also quotes the 'alienist' Sir James Crichton Brown's theory of 'dreamy states'[8]. This is the description he gives to 'sudden invasions of vaguely reminiscent consciousness' - the feeling of having been there before often reported as part of mystical experiences. According to Crichton Brown, these bring '...a sense of mystery and the metaphysical duality of things, and the feeling of an enlargement of perception which seems imminent but never completes itself'[9]. These words aptly describe the state Evans struggles to convey in *Autobiography*:

> The divisions of time fail. As I sit here I don't know whether it's today or yesterday, and I don't believe the rooks do either. I seem to have a part in each and nothing to join them together with. There's a memory in me like a landscape full of my first delight (*A* p.6).

Dr Crichton Brown connects these feelings with 'the perplexed and scared disturbances of self consciousness which occasionally precede epileptic attacks'[10].

For over a hundred years neurologists have been studying and recording the altered states produced by the abnormal discharges in the brains of

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[7] William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, Centenary ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.329.
[8] James, p.298.
[9] James, p.298.
[10] James, p.298.

epileptics. In a 1983 article in *Epilepsia*, the Journal of the International League against Epilepsy, Norman Geschwind suggests that 'common behavioural alterations associated with epilepsy include an increased interest in philosophical and religious concerns and extensive writing of a cosmic or philosophical nature'[11]. He hypothesises that this behaviour is the result of an 'intermittent spike focus in the temporal lobe' which affects the response of the limbic system, the area of the brain which controls emotion and emotional response as well as mood and sensations of pain and pleasure. This alteration caused by the abnormal discharge in the brain of an epileptic may result in heightened emotional responses to many different stimuli. D. F. Benson has since suggested that these behavioural traits amount to a personality disorder he has named Geschwind's Syndrome[12]. Although the existence of such a syndrome remains controversial, the fact that clinicians treating epileptic sufferers have recognised such characteristics in numbers of their patients points to the complex relationship between the anatomical and the psychological[13].

Although in *Autobiography* Evans is describing sensations experienced ten years before her first major fit and the diagnosis of epilepsy, it is possible that Evans's mystical experiences, her sense of being haunted, her meditations on the relationship between mind, soul and body, her sense of the irrelevance of time and union with nature had a neurological base, especially in view of her remark in *A Ray of Darkness* that she has experienced 'absences' for as long as she can remember: 'I cannot recall when I was without moments of separation from my consciousness – moments when I was quite literally conscious and unconscious at the same time' (*RD* p.38).

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[11] N. Geschwind, 'Interictal Behavioural Changes in Epilepsy', *Epilepsia*, Vol.24: S4 (1983), 23-30.
[12] D. F. Benson, 'The Geschwind Syndrome', *Advances in Neurology*, 55 (1991), 411-421.
[13] In his recent book, *Cycles and Psyche* (Chicago: Higganum Hill Books, 2004), Michael Sperber suggests that Henry David Thoreau, one of Evans's favourite authors whom she often cites in *Autobiography* as sharing her mystical response to nature, suffered from Geschwind Syndrome.

Finding a language to express these mystical moments of perception is the central preoccupation of *Autobiography*. Language can be seen as occupying a position at the interface between body and mind: it is where thought must become tangible and communicable. However, Evans struggles to express her sense that her 'meaning grew in the earth and firmament' (*A* p.39) but words literally fail her. Her thoughts cannot be expressed. She says, 'I think in a language I cannot speak' (*A* p.117) and, 'I understand without words the thought that is in me: but without words what may be *testified?*' (*A* p.86). The urge to communicate is strong; she records her desire to 'reproduce and retain some record tangible' of what she sees and loves in the earth, but the right words will not come: 'The air and the light will not get into the paper' (*A* p.61). She feels that her language, rather than connecting her to others, sets her apart, 'Wherever I go I must carry speech in my mouth and brain which is as incomprehensible to the other kinds of being as the sparrows' jangling is to me' (*A* p.61). Hence, she must work hard to acquire a common language but she is ambivalent about this project because she fears that in acquiring this language she will lose the very thing she seeks to express – her sense of communion with the earth. She cannot name all the flowers and creatures she observes in her garden on a May morning, still less can she find words to convey her feelings of 'beauty and joy, rest and energy':

> And I cannot tell of them without our having a common symbol between us, and so I must learn more, twisting away from them, to a closer understanding with people risking the infinite loss of the direct and wordless touch of the earth (*A* p.62).

She is intensely frustrated by her attempts, convinced that her writing is 'tedious' and 'inadequate'. 'I must use words which I loathe when I would go beyond words, write beyond print, show more of moments, days, of life, than

paper can take' (*A* p.61). Evans's struggle to find a language to voice her deeply felt perceptions recalls Virginia Woolf who twenty years before was expressing similar sentiments in her diary '...and still I say to myself instinctively, "What's the phrase for that?" and try to make more and more vivid the roughness of the air current and the tremor of the rook's wing' (Sunday 12th August 1928)[14].

The difficulties experienced by both Woolf and Evans in finding an appropriate language to express themselves can be explained with reference to the Lacanian idea that language is necessarily slippery and ambiguous and can only ever offer an approximation of what it seeks to express[15]. Thus when human beings are in extremis, experiencing feelings of fear pain or love they become inarticulate, even speechless. As Bernard puts it in *The Waves*:

> What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? By what name are we to call death? I do not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak...I need a howl, a cry...I need no words...I have done with phrases. How much better is silence?[16]

Evans comes close to the same conviction: that there simply is no language to express her thoughts and that, therefore, silence comes closer to truth: 'I have failed to describe it because language cannot form the thought, because it is wordless and unimaginable and pictureless' (*A* p.96).

Lacanian theory also illuminates Evans's conviction that language simply fails her when she attempts to describe her relationship with the natural world. For Evans, nature was the mirror in which she saw herself reflected. It constituted a return to what Lacan describes as the Imaginary stage, which is one of phantasised wholeness and plenitude[17]. In this sense nature, for her, was Mother Nature reflecting back to her a self

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[14] Virginia Woolf, ed., Anne Olivier Bell, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III: 1925-30* (London: Penguin, 1982), p.191.
[15] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, a selection translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (First pub. Éditions du Seuil, 1966; First translation, Tavistock, 1977; repr. London: Routledge, 1997), p.154.
[16] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.246.
[17] Lacan, *Écrits*, pp.1-7.

which was whole and in harmony with itself and its surroundings. As Terry Eagleton describes it, Lacan's Imaginary is a condition in which the self seems to pass into objects and vice versa in a ceaseless closed exchange: the image a pre-linguistic child sees in the mirror is somehow the meaning of itself[18]. This can be compared with Evans's observation in *Autobiography*, 'I stood leaning on a gate. I was behind the sky. I was in the ground. I was in the space between the trees. My meaning grew in the earth and the firmament' (*A* p.39).

From the full imaginary possession of the mother's body and the illusion of wholeness reflected back to the child in the mirror, she is propelled into the empty world of language. This is an empty world because the sign presupposes the absence of the object it seeks to describe. Language, according to Lacan, is motivated by loss and desire and this goes to the heart of Evans's problem[19]. As soon as she introduces language into her relationship with nature, then the harmony and sense of unity is lost. Because language stands in for absent objects and nature is so intimately present to her, her attempts to capture it in words are bound to fail; language cannot render the object fully present. Language itself creates desire by severing the individual from the mother's body. The more Evans attempts to use language, the more she perceives a separation between herself and what she is trying to describe.

As Shari Benstock suggests, autobiography 'reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins in the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers the premises of its construction'[20]. The subject, through autobiography, strives towards the 'false symmetry' of the mirror, a

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[18] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.144.
[19] Lacan, *Écrits*, pp.146-175.
[20] Shari Benstock, ed. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p.11.

unified self which can only ever be a fiction'[21]. By attempting to order her perceptions in an autobiography, Evans shows herself again to be striving for the sense of wholeness, the misleadingly harmonious image in the mirror. The mirror can therefore be seen as an analogy for the self-reflective process which is autobiography.

Here again, Lacan's thinking is relevant to the project of autobiography. For Lacan, the 'I' is also elusive and its unity illusory. The unity between the speaking 'I' and the 'I' described in speech is imaginary. According to his famous reworking of Descartes, 'I am not where I think, and I think where I am not'[22]. Again, Evans anticipates this in *Autobiography*, 'Such is the power of life over me then that I lose language and think only by being' (*A* p.152). She expresses her sense of a self that is fragmented and dispersed, '...the stems that touched my hands, the ant hills, the crickets that jerked, and the silent clouds had my mind in them. I could not write: I could not concentrate, for my being was in everything' (*A* p.152).

But paradoxically, she produces her book; she perceives that for her 'being' *is* writing. This is the only means she has of creating herself, 'Each time I take hold of a pen it's like being born – and the spirit hangs back knowing the greater joy of unconsciousness' (*A* p.24). Writing brings her into being, but it is painful, like birth, so much so that she resists and avoids it, but even when too ill to write she feels the 'guiltiness of the infant to be stillborn who will not enter the struggle' (*A* p.24). When she does manage to write she feels that some of her thoughts do transfer to the page; they are pressed on the surface as her thoughts press on her brain: 'At last this white oblong half covered with words, pushed into a shut book and apparently disregarded,

[21] Ibid. p.12.
[22] Lacan, *Écrits,* p.166.

has become almost an inner part of me' (*A* p.61). She incorporates the writing; it becomes herself.

A Ray of Darkness: writing 'a great story' (*RD* p.10)

A Ray of Darkness is its author's response to the physical calamity which befell her on May 11th 1950. Alone in the Black Cottage at Elkstone between 11pm and midnight she suffered her first epileptic fit. She regained consciousness to discover that she was lying on the floor; she had lost control of her bladder and her head was cut and bleeding: her body had failed her, cutting loose from her mind's control with the result that she felt that she had fallen through 'Time, Continuity and Being' (*RD* p.78). She could see by the clock that she had lost time: seventy minutes between 11.10 and 12.20 and with it the continuity of her life had been disrupted. At 11.10 she was sitting at her table with a cup of tea and at 12.20 the tea was spilt, time had been lost and her very being compromised.

For Evans, 'being' was intensely associated with physicality, as is evidenced in her entire 'corpus'. She experienced herself and others as embodied beings. In the novels Evans ensures that her characters have a vividly realised physical presence: for example in *Creed* Mrs Trouncer is described as, 'a gross woman with a glazed face and bilious eyes'[23]. A theme also emerges of the body's ability to be the source of both pleasure and pain. In *Turf or Stone*, Phoebe and her sister lie in the sun naked, playing 'Modest Marys'[24]. Superficially this seems to be about pubescent girls daring to explore the mysterious and paradoxical feelings of power, sensuality and lassitude

[23] Margiad Evans, *Creed* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), p.34.
[24] Margiad Evans, *Turf or Stone* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1934), p.167.

unleashed by their emerging sexuality, but there is also a frisson of fear introduced by the sense of an unseen and possibly threatening observer of their game. This episode is a close reworking of incidents described in the contemporary journals where Peggy and her sister Nancy take similar delight in daring to be naked: 'We bathed and swam N [her sister, Nancy] & I, in our nakedness, and saw two astonished men staring from the opposite bank' (August 6th 1933)[25].

The novels also explore what happens when the body moves beyond the mind's control. In *Turf or Stone* Mary's body betrays her by responding sexually to Easter against her will and better judgement. She also describes an unnerving experience when she finds herself on the other side of a room with no idea how she arrived there. This seems to indicate a situation where mind and body have become completely separated and is born of its author's real experience reported years later in *A Ray of Darkness*: 'I have often crossed a room, and, while not losing sight or bearings, not known how I crossed it' (p.39).

The body is also made to speak when words are impossible or inadequate. Ann's wound in *Country Dance* speaks of her murder; Arabella's illness in *The Wooden Doctor* speaks of her desire for the doctor who comes to heal her ailing body and Florence's body suffering the mutilation of mastectomy in *Creed* speaks of the projected guilt of her husband. In *A Ray of Darkness* the author's body literally speaks the unspeakable as it falls into fits she cannot control and which deprive her of speech.

In *A Ray of Darkness* she returns to many of the same themes which had preoccupied her in *Autobiography*. However, there is a crucial difference: the new book will be a 'pathography': an account of her illness. She begins by

[25] NLW, MS 23366D, p.147.

defending her impulse to write about her illness: 'All people afflicted with neurosis, neurotic tendencies, diseases or threats of the diseases of the brain or mind seem to write a great many letters' (*RD* p.9). Such people, Evans claims, are 'garrulous' and she explains that the reason for this is 'a passionate yearning as one retreats further and further from their understanding to be understood by ordinary and well people' (p.9). To use Susan Sontag's metaphor such people, through their letters, are attempting to communicate, to send messages from the kingdom of the sick where they are exiled to the kingdom of the well[26]. Such attempts are, however, fraught with difficulty. In *A Ray of Darkness*, Evans repeatedly cites John Custance's book, *Wisdom, Madness and Folly*, with which she was very familiar and which may have provided her with a model for her own pathography. Custance, a manic-depressive, points to two problems in communicating with the well: firstly, he has found that even close friends and relatives show little interest in his accounts of his illness and secondly, he himself tries to forget his acute episodes, once they are over.

Virginia Woolf makes a similar point about the isolation of those who are sick in *On Being Ill*, 'But sympathy we cannot have,' and offers an explanation: ' ...the experience cannot be imparted...his own suffering serves but to wake memories in his friends' minds of their influenzas, their aches and pains which went unwept last February'[27]. If we were to take on the burden of one another's illness then the world would grind to a halt, 'buildings would cease to rise; roads would peter out into grassy tracks; there would be an end of music and of painting'[28]. Woolf says that bearing one another's pain would lead

[26] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p.3.
[27] Woolf, Virginia, *'On Being Ill'* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1930; repr. Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 2002), pp.8-9.
[28] Woolf, p.9.

to the end of certain artistic pursuits, but not the end of writing, because illness here, as elsewhere, is her subject[29].

Like both Woolf and Custance, Evans experienced the incomprehension and lack of sympathy of friends and family, especially the latter whom she describes as 'unbelieving', explaining that for them it was a matter of protesting against the idea of having a family member suffering from epilepsy (*RD* p.98). But Evans, like Woolf, responds to her illness by writing. She says that she wishes to remember the preceding year when she suffered 'major epilepsy' and, to her, the obvious vehicle for her memories is a book, 'This longing to write of one's symptoms appears like an inspiration to write a great story' (*RD* p.10).

In her urge to write a pathography, a story of her illness, Evans's text, published in 1952, is at the beginning of what Anne Hunsaker Hawkins in her study, *Restructuring Illness: Studies in Pathography* (1993), sees as a phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century. She remarks that book-length personal accounts of illness are uncommon before 1950 and rare before 1900[30]. Hawkins sees pathographies as tending to dramatise illness, an insight which accords with Evans's feeling that this will be a 'great story' (*RD* p.10).

This idea is repeated and extended at the end of her first chapter where she writes that symptoms are

> ...a continuous story, an adventure serial where the end, if not happy is definite. Our health is as a voyage: and every illness is an adventure story. The leader of the adventure is the doctor: think of him as the Captain if you wish, while the patient is vessel, crew and passenger all in one. The Captain, trained in navigation, foresees the dangers and pains

[29] In *The Nightingale Silenced* (NLW MS 23368B) Evans draws a parallel between herself and Woolf. 'Nearly all writers are ill: why nobody seems to notice or enquire: but a short study of them reveals that this is truth.' She then proceeds to quote an episode from Woolf's short story, 'Together and Apart' (London: The Hogarth Press, 1944), which she suggests might be a description of a minor seizure. 'I am not hinting that Virginia Woolf was epileptic: but I am hinting at the resemblance between all illnesses and all sensitivenesses' (pp.171-2).

[30] Hawkins, p.3.

> of the ocean, the passenger, like Melville's Ishmael in the crow's nest, looks out on the wondrous Pacific calms, the deeps and the waves he must sail without head knowledge (pp.11-12).

In Evans's analogy the doctor is the Captain of her ship; he can foresee the 'dangers and pains' of the voyage but it is the sufferer alone who perceives that there is more to the experience. Arthur Frank makes a distinction between the pre-modern, modern and the post-modern experiences of illness. The characteristic that separates modern from pre-modern experiences is the technical expertise that is increasingly brought to bear, with its diagnostic tests and treatment programmes. He asserts that in the modern period, medical charts, the 'medical narrative', becomes the over riding story of illness. Quoting Talcott Parsons' analysis of the sick role which is contemporary with the publication of *A Ray of Darkness*, he points to Parsons' observation that the social expectation of the sick person is that she surrenders herself to the care of her doctor. Frank adds, 'I understand this obligation of seeking medical care as a narrative surrender and mark it as the central moment in Modernist illness experience'[31].

According to Frank, 'Illness has come to feel different during the last twenty years, and today the sum of those differences can be labelled Postmodernism'[32]. The main difference Frank notes is that from the mid 1970s patients, realising that their illness stories cannot simply be told in medical terms, seek to tell their own. The ill person in Parsons' model accepts having his particular story integrated into medicine's general view of the disease rather than of individual experiences. Postmodern pathographers tell their stories to reassert their individuality and to ensure that medicine recognises its need of

[31] Frank, p.6.
[32] Ibid. p.4.

them. In Evans's analogy, without the vessel, which is the sufferer, the captain's position would be meaningless: he would be without a command.

It has already been noted that *A Ray of Darkness* is very unusual being a book length account of illness produced in the early 1950s. This is reinforced if one considers it in the light of Frank's definition: Evans can be seen to have been writing a postmodern account of her illness at least twenty years before its time. Her aim is Postmodernist: to place herself outside 'the unifying general view'[33] and to reflect on 'body, self and the destination that life's map leads to'[34]. In Parsons' model the sole responsibility of the patient was to surrender herself to the physician in order to recover her health; in postmodern society the patient has to take responsibility for what the illness means to herself as an individual and her life. In this way, Evans's project in *A Ray of Darkness* is closer to what the sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to as the reflexive project of the self which he sees as a characteristic of late modernity. He sees the self as consisting of a set of biographical narratives which the individual continuously works on and revises. Writing in 1991, Giddens remarks:

> A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' of the self[35].

In *A Ray of Darkness* Evans seeks to reflect on the calamitous events surrounding and including her first seizure in order to integrate it as a biographical narrative into her sense of who she is, but the response to her book

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[33] Frank, p.13.
[34] Ibid. p.7.
[35] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Identity in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p.54.

published in a private leaflet by the British Epilepsy Association reinforces the fact that Evans's approach was out of step with her time.

The reviewer writes that Evans gives a personal (my emphasis) answer to the question, what does it feel like to have epilepsy? However the reviewer is disappointed: 'Margiad Evans is an egotist, as she herself states...For her, epilepsy becomes part of her egotism, a wholly personal experience rather than one which many others know'[36]. Referring to her reaction to epilepsy as that of 'an unusual, even distorted personality' the review concludes, '... it would have made far more interesting reading if more care had been taken in putting the book together. "Impressionist writing" need not leave such a haphazard impression'[37]. The British Epilepsy Society reviewer, 'a brilliant young scientist' (Letter to Bryher, 29th April 1953), mounted what seems to be an unnecessarily personal and virulent attack, criticising Evans for precisely the approach that Arthur Frank describes[38]. She has moved beyond the Modernist experience of illness, which requires her to generalise her account in medical terms, to the postmodern position where she has found her own distinctive voice to reflect on her personal experience of the condition. In 1965, the British Epilepsy Association was still defending its position: 'It always seemed to those who know about her case that her vivid descriptions about her own experience in her book were not generally applicable to epilepsy'[39]. Evans could not be forgiven for writing about her individual, egotistical experience of epilepsy: what the disease meant for her.

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[36] NLW File 20: British Epilepsy Journal News Letter, Number 3, January 1953.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Bryher Papers. General Collection. Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University. For Bryher, see p.210.
[39] NLW File 20: British Epilepsy Association Letter to Arnold Thorpe March 13th 1965. Arnold Thorpe compiled letters and information intending to write a biography of Evans. He died before completing the project.

Evans was particularly 'hurt and offended' by what she saw as the deliberate misreading of her use of the word egotist by a 'second rate mind' (Letter to Bryher, 29th April 1953)[40]. In *A Ray of Darkness* she explains:

> The epileptic person is an egotist, a supreme egotist, but not by nature selfish...If a person is born an egotist there is more to be received from him and more for him to give forth, than by trying to force him to a more general outlook (pp.26-27).

The reviewer's understanding of an egotist appears to be in the conventional, pejorative sense which Evans gives later in her book, 'one who makes too much use of the pronoun "I"' (p.65). Evans, however, sees the egotist as someone who is an individual with a unique perspective on life simply because it is not the general view. There is another factor compelling the epileptic to strive to protect and preserve their ego, which she describes as another word for the self, the individual consciousness: 'People who suffer from epilepsy are egoists. They must try to be themselves and cling to themselves more than normal people, for they are likely at any moment to become something else' (p.65). Evans's argument is strikingly modern in its argument about the self which she feels is threatened by her disease.

The excessive production of writing has been an acknowledged feature of some types of epilepsy since an article published by Stephen G. Waxman and Norman Geschwind in the Journal *Neurology* in 1974[41]. Their abstract states, 'The phenomenon of hypergraphia, or the tendency toward extensive and, in some cases, compulsive writing in temporal lobe epilepsy is described in seven patients...Unusually detailed and strikingly copious writing was evidenced in each patient.' They go on to report that much of this writing was concerned with

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[40] Yale, Bryher Papers.

[41] Stephen G. Waxman and Norman Geschwind, 'Hypergraphia in Temporal Lobe Epilepsy', *Neurology*, 24 (7) (1974), 629-36.

'religious or moral issues.' D. F Benson describes the characteristics of Geschwind Syndrome as consisting of 'circumstantiality (excessive verbal output, stickiness, hypergraphia), altered sexuality (usually hyposexuality), and intensified mental life (deepened cognitive and emotional responses)'[42]. Benson backs up his hypothesis by enumerating the many clinicians who have described and attempted to manage seizure patients who display these symptoms.

The application of this to Margiad Evans is obvious. Her books, especially the late writing starting with *Autobiography* and encompassing *A Ray of Darkness* and the unpublished autobiographical *The Nightingale Silenced* and *The Immortal Hospital*, a memoir of childhood written for her daughter, are evidence of her 'deepened cognitive and emotional responses'. They are also characterised by religious and philosophical meditations, a feature of the condition also marked by Geschwind in his original article. While there is no evidence of 'hyposexuality', Evans does make a connection between her disease and sexuality noting that after the first fits she 'expected to be a different person, just as if I had committed a great crime or been converted to a sexual perversion' (*RD* p.86). And after ten years of marriage she gave birth to her first child in March 1951, ten months after the onset of the seizures.

Above all, however, there was the compulsion to write. Evans records how in the years leading up to her first seizure she experienced a sense of restlessness and 'hurry' (*RD* p.16) which extended to her writing: she was racing over the pages without stopping and the effect of this was that her prose deteriorated, in her own analysis, into a 'scurry and a tediousness'. However, she felt that she had been able to write some 'remarkable lyric poems of real

[42] D. F. Benson, 'The Geschwind Syndrome', *Advanced Neurology*, 55 (1991), 411-21.

beauty' (*RD* p.16). Recalling the winter before her first seizure, she recorded how

> ...account books, exercise books and scribbling blocks [were] crowded with poems and writing, as my brain was crowded with impressions...a solitary wild duck on the marshy meres among the rushes became pageants to be caught in words –and words – and more words...my writing had always been so sparing of itself that I had to search for it, whereas now it flooded everything (*RD* p.56).

She writes of impressions rushing in on her

> ...with an almost insufferable pressure....Nothing I saw at that period *was silent*, but all spoke to me of themselves. It was like a great symphony which never ended, in which the instruments were running away with the music to disaster (*RD* p.76).

She employs the striking auditory image again when she is waiting for her first appointment with Professor Golla who was the Director of the Burden Neurological Institute in Bristol:

> And now, I whose mental processes had been so uncannily accelerated for years, whose imagery was so urgent, overcrowded, like an orchestra crowded with instruments, had to spin out thoughts as a curtain against horror. Fear of the yet unexperienced cycle of the pits, the intervals between them, horror of myself. Every waking was a shock and an enigma: 'Is this myself? Is it a nightmare?' (*RD* p.85).

The repeated musical image effectively conveys her experience of thoughts which, in the years immediately preceding the onset of the fits, assaulted her brain with an overwhelming cacophony of imagined sound. Now the fits have started, thoughts have to be marshalled as protection from the horror of the suffering self whose very identity is shaken by the experience of the seizures, causing her to ask: 'Is this myself?' (*RD* p.85)

Several other writers who are also thought to have suffered from epilepsy express similar sensations of being overwhelmed by impressions and images

that call out to be expressed together with the fear that the sufferer's sense of self and identity is under threat. Dostoevsky, whom Evans admired, described his drive to write as a way of purging himself of memories brought to the surface by epileptic fits[43]. Flaubert wrote that he felt 'a whirlpool of ideas and images in my poor brain during which it seemed that my consciousness, that my me sank like a vessel in a storm'[44]. Tennyson's experience of seizures also involved a 'sinking' of the 'me': 'All at once out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being'[45].

It seems that certain types of epileptic seizures both fuel the impulse to write and bring unusual states of sensitivity and perception to the writer. Evans's doctor, Professor F.L Golla, wrote an appreciation of *A Ray of Darkness*, which was printed alongside the first instalment when it was serialised in the John Bull magazine in October 1952. Here he observed that

> ...most cases of epilepsy exhibit in a varying degree some divergence from the normal approach to mental life. In the many cases where writers of genius have been sufferers, it is fascinating to trace how greatly their sensibility and creative ability have been enhanced by the liability of their nervous system to respond as a whole[46].

He considered that while reading *A Ray of Darkness* it is possible 'to appreciate the degree in which the expression of her total personality has been facilitated by the malady'[47]. Golla clearly felt that the abnormal discharges in his patient's brain actually enhanced her ability to convey her 'total personality' in writing, allowing readers access to the author's thoughts and feelings which are a

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[43] *Famous writers with epilepsy* [online]. Available at: http://www.my.epilepsy.com/epilepsy/famous_writers [Accessed: 10th November, 2010]
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Margiad Evans, 'A Ray of Darkness', *John Bull*, Oct. 18th 1952, p.8.
[47] Ibid, p.8.

compelling aspect of the text. This is especially interesting in view of her own sense that becoming an epileptic meant that she had to accustom herself to losing herself (*RD* p.36).

The Book: Communicating suffering and loss of identity

In the opening chapter, Evans reflects on her motivations for writing *A Ray of Darkness*: 'Cut off from mentioning my fits in conversation or in letters, I resolved that I would write the plain narrative as a book' (*RD* p.10). The reason that she felt unable to describe her fits to others in letters or conversation is presumably that given on the previous page: the lack of interest or sympathy shown by friends and family. However, a series of letters from the period to her friend and benefactor Bryher, do exist and do make mention of her illness. Bryher was the pseudonym of the American writer Winifred Ellman whom Evans never met but who, beginning with a travel award in April 1949 administered through the Society of Authors, regularly sent generous gifts of money and other items. Evans started a correspondence in September 1949 to thank Bryher for the holiday she and her husband enjoyed in Ireland paid for by the travel award; the letters only ceased just before Evans's death when illness made her physically unable to write. Evans also dedicated *A Ray of Darkness* to Bryher. In these letters to a woman whom she had never met, but with whom she sensed a sympathy and connection from their shared experience as writers, she could feel free to speak of her illness, in a way talking, as if to herself, about the horror of the fits and her fears about the future. The first reference to her illness is made in a letter dated October 15th 1950, five months after her first seizure: 'I have been having fits...all summer we have been here and there finding out what to do. The answer is – nothing.' She describes herself in a letter

written two weeks later as 'feeble and frightened and nightmarish' and 'not good'. She writes that according to her doctors it is not a 'disease of brain or body' but simply a ruptured vein from a childhood riding accident. Despite this reassurance she feels uneasy, 'But I do wonder about this thing for who knows?' (Letter to Bryher, 26th October 1950)[48].

The trauma of the fit is so disorientating that it leads to what Hawkins calls 'a counter impulse towards creation and order'[49]. Hawkins quotes Robert Jay Lifton who writes in his study of the survivors of Hiroshima about the process of 'formulation'. By this he means 'a process that deals with trauma by imagination and interpretation.' Formulation aims to overcome a traumatic experience and to re-establish communication with objective reality and with other people[50]. Hawkins sees pathography as the 'final stage in the process of formulation, completing the bridge between the suffering self and the outside world by an overt act of communication'[51].

One of the means by which pathographers convey their experiences, according to Hawkins, is by employing what she refers to as 'mythic thinking', that is the use of metaphor to convey profound truth. She says that 'Mythic thinking of all kinds becomes apparent in that delicate autobiographical transition from "actual" experience to written narrative'[52]. She suggests that the two prevailing myths used by sufferers to convey their experience of illness are those of the battle and the journey. The actual experience may have involved travelling no further than the local hospital, but the profound truth of the journey

[48] Yale, Bryher Papers.
[49] Hawkins, p.24.
[50] Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York: Random House, 1967), pp.525-6.
[51] Hawkins, p.25.
[52] Hawkins, p.18.

myth is in its ability to describe the inner person's perception of the journey from the kingdom of the well to the kingdom of the sick[53].

Evans persistently uses the image of the voyage in relation to her illness. The patient, however, has experiences on the voyage that the doctor, trained only in navigation, cannot share:

> For in disease there are wondrous calms and profound lulls: there are thoughts and contemplations of which no other deeps can give us hints, and the voyage, to the sufferer, may even be beautiful though he never again see land or home (*RD* p.12).

Evans's perception that the sufferer may find her voyage beautiful and may afford insights not available to the well recalls Woolf who, lying on her sick bed, records the opportunity it gives to really look at the sky for the first time in years and to realise that rather than being 'mutilated by chimneys and churches', and merely acting as a 'background for man,' it is in fact an 'extraordinary spectacle'; 'divinely beautiful'[54].

For Hawkins, the journey 'remains a potent and ancient metaphor for any kind of heroic exploration of the unknown, the dangerous and the frightening and is thus especially appropriate to experiences of serious illness'[55]. Evans uses the image of the voyage in just this way, but unlike many pathographers who expect to return to the 'land of the well', Evans implies that she expects no such joyous landfall or homecoming. This impression is reinforced by her other uses of the metaphor later in the book. She reflects on the 'absolutely different nature of music and poetry', activities which kept her mind still, 'though the voyage had begun, and the ship was soon to breathe up

[53] Sontag, p.3.
[54] Woolf, *On Being Ill,* pp.12-14.
[55] Hawkins, p.78.

and down in the rhythm of the oceans and the seamen gaze round on only loneliness and sky' (*RD* p.54). Here, continuing the idea expressed in her earlier use of the voyage metaphor, she sees herself as the ship whose journey into illness has begun and who will soon be tossed up and down in the relentless ebb and flow of the epileptic seizures. This impression is reinforced by the personification of the ship which 'breathes' up and down, helpless in the rhythm of the sea. The seamen, versions of her suffering self, can only gaze out on loneliness and sky, a desolate and forlorn fate.

Hawkins speaks of the protagonist in a pathography representing the hero in a journey metaphor who returns to the 'realm of the ordinary' with some prize or knowledge. This might be the gift of renewed health or a deeper understanding of the self. The prize might also be the pathography itself, 'the record of an experience articulated, shaped and formulated'[56]. This is particularly applicable to *A Ray of Darkness* as Evans repeatedly speculates in the book that her failure to write, her 'creative laziness' (*RD* p.173), has contributed to her illness. The act of writing the book could be seen as an attempt by Evans to remedy this. The book, therefore, is the prize she returns with from the kingdom of the sick, but more than this, for Evans it might be the passport which enables a return across the border. If the fits are the result of her neglecting her Muse, the book is evidence of her renewed attention and, therefore, may be a way of avoiding their recurrence.

Evans's journey takes her to 'The Other Side of the Wave', which is the title she gives to the second part of her book describing her first fit and its aftermath:

[56] Hawkins, pp.78-79.

> How very often, standing on the shore, have I seen that high line of water coming in, and wondered what tidal bird, what face, what being, tossed beyond it, moving always, and always hidden? This is the mystery of the stormy sea, and the mystery of Consciousness, that one word for Time, Self and Response. It was now May the tenth – the last day on my shore (pp.76-77).

The next night, the first seizure carries her over the wave (*RD* p.77), and she leaves the safety of the shore forever. This resembles what Hawkins describes as the myth of exile, which is enforced on the individual and invokes feelings of 'estrangement, alienation and separation'[57]. When she regains consciousness after the fit, she describes a feeling 'that the soul did not know whither it had returned, to the right earth or to an unknown one' (*RD* p.81). Her soul is exiled and uncertain as to where it now belongs. She recalls the horror of coming round alone after a fit '...with no-one to welcome you to yourself again and to introduce you to the life which had turned its back on you' (*RD* p.99). The seizures cause her to feel exiled, not only from the kingdom of the well, but also from herself.

Like Virginia Woolf, Evans uses the image of a blurred pane of glass to convey her sense of isolation from the world. In her essay, *On Being Ill*, Woolf observes that literature does its best to represent the body 'as a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear'. The body of a healthy person perhaps conforms more closely to this transparent glass as its functioning may not impinge on the consciousness of the individual. Woolf contends that in fact far from being a clear pane, 'the body intervenes all the time – the creative can only gaze through the pane – be it smudged or rosy'[58]. In *Autobiography*, written when she had no fears about her health, Evans celebrated the transparency of her skin through which she felt sensations from the natural

[57] Hawkins, p.79.
[58] Woolf, p.4.

world passing unhindered: 'My eyes have touch, my skin on which the air plays seems to be as glass through which I can look through every pore' (*A* p.94).

However, ten years later, the pane of glass through which she perceived her world became increasingly 'smudged' because of her seizures. She recognised that this was happening:

> The terror [her seizures] has without any doubt deeply affected me emotionally and mentally: I know I am changed since I wrote *Autobiography*....The world, the earth with its trees, plants, animals, its ores and rivers and seas is not less beautiful to me but is more blurred. It is not so much myself as it was. My soul has grown short-sighted (p.156).

Her vision of the natural world, minutely observed in *Autobiography* has been obscured, but more than that the fits have blurred her vision to the extent that she feels a fundamental change in the relationship. The earth is no longer her mirror:

> There was a time, not more than a few years ago, when the air, the sky, all the natural vision of the earth and its tribes was such a picture of me to myself. The earth was as myself. It is not quite so now. Sometime – I don't quite know when – the separation happened (p.92).

In the earlier book her body is described as closely identified with the earth and the communion between the two is physical: 'the touch of the ground' can heal her hand, she can be the field and the trees, the earth is her 'greater flesh' (*A*. p.88). She recalls this time in *A Ray of Darkness* as a period of great happiness which she cannot hope to recapture. With the onset of epilepsy, her body has moved beyond her control: her internal world and sense of self falters because messages from her brain to her body fail or become scrambled and chaotic. As she describes it after her first seizure, 'nothing physical or mental was in unison, nor were they ready to fuse and to act for one body' (*RD* p.79). If

she can no longer feel confident of her body, then Nature with which she had associated it, is similarly blurred and distant.

Her separation from Nature is also mourned in the later work, *The Nightingale Silenced*, written in 1954 when admitted to Tunbridge Wells Hospital following a deterioration in her condition when the epilepsy had become acute. She describes how when walking one evening in a rainstorm she began to feel ill and stumbled to a horse chestnut tree and put her arms round the trunk, hoping to 'take strength from it'. This fails and she struggles home where she falls into a series of fits:

> After that I knew there was to be no comfort, no strength to be drawn from nature. Somehow the association had been severed....and because nature and weather and landscape had failed I knew everything had, for people like myself cannot live long sanely without that pouring from one kind of being into another. No not love, sexual or maternal replaces it. That my projection of conscious life into plants, animals, trees, the land even in all its contours was scientifically illogical I knew, but it made no difference to my not being able to exist without it[59].

The image of her embracing a tree hoping to draw strength from it in extremis, as she might have from another human being, is key to understanding the quality of the life-giving mental and physical relationship she has had with nature. When that fails to sustain her she feels that her very existence is threatened.

The image of the blurred pane of glass also recurs in *The Nightingale Silenced* where she uses it to convey her feelings when a seizure is imminent:

> When I first went into the Neurological Unit at Clystowe there was not the slightest outward sign of an epileptic disturbance. Only horror. And causeless fear and a certain blurring of the consciousness as though the brain had been washed over with a dirty wet rag. Exactly as one sees through a dirty or badly cleaned window[60].

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[59] NLW, MS 23367B, pp.39-40.
[60] NLW, MS 23367B, p.67.

The image is very practical, recalling Evans's sense that she had lived a very domestic life, perhaps at the expense of her writing, but it also conveys her perception of the relationship between brain and body. The first sign of impending physical catastrophe is that her mental capacities and perceptions lose their acuity.

Her sense of herself as lost as a result of her illness is reinforced by another metaphoric thread: that of the body as a house in which there are many rooms. Describing in *A Ray of Darkness* how she reacts to her sense that a fit is imminent, she says: 'One turns round or away from helpers, if they are present, if not, from the presence of the appalling calamity in the room which is the body' (*RD* p.155). Again later she describes how in the 'hovering moment' before the onset of a seizure she became possessed of a 'light-hearted notion...that there were so many people in me to choose from and so many rooms I could go into all at once that there must be immunity or sanctuary in one of them' (*RD* pp.173-4). Nearly four years later she returns to the same idea in *The Nightingale Silenced* where she says she hopes that she may have helped others '...to discover that the body has many mansions and that the senses and the emotions can move with will power behind them, out of the region of suffering[61]. The image recalls the passage in John 14.1-4 when Jesus assures the disciples that there will be room for all in His Father's house, because it consists of 'many mansions' (King James version). The choice of this image reflects Evans's intense desire to find a sanctuary when threatened by an impending seizure, and the fact that she held on to the image as her condition worsened is proof of its efficacy. In *The Nightingale Silenced* she says that she is convinced

[61] NLW, MS 23368B, p.115.

that thinking of the relationship between the body and its pain in these terms is 'a way of avoiding much mental fear and physical pain'[62].

The language and idea behind the image are specifically Christian, and evidence of her increasingly religious awareness. The power of the image is strengthened by her real experience that many of the fits occur in doorways, as if her body is physically mirroring her mind by trying to flee the calamity in 'the room which is the body' through a doorway to another safer place:

> Every fit except two had happened in a doorway...But this did not prove a double entity or a two-way symbolism of existence necessarily, as I had thought. Could it not symbolize, or be an attempt of the Ego, to be though one, in many places? (*RD* p.177)

Here she prefers to see her 'Ego' as spreading rather than splitting because the idea of being more than one entity horrifies her, undermining as it does the vision of unity which had sustained her all her life, and which she had articulated in *Autobiography* (*RD* p.178). This preoccupation with doorways continues in *The Nightingale Silenced* where again they are linked with attempts to escape impending seizures:

> As for the inevitable longing to escape [from a fit], the concentration of interest upon doorways, it seems as if the spirit were seeking refuge and looking vainly, madly, for another firm and more unassailable body. My mind in a minor attack constantly showed this good sense[63].

In the later writing, her preoccupation extends to doors themselves which she wants to be both shut and open:

> I thought I could be both sides of the same one....There seemed to be long periods when to be both sides of the door at once seemed quite possible and sensible; and that not only was the door of my bedroom both shut and open, but that I was that door myself [64].

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[62] NLW, MS 23368B, p.115.
[63] NLW, MS 23368B, pp.68-9.
[64] NLW, MS 23367B, p.48.

Reason tells her that a door cannot be both shut and open at the same time but 'the shadowy and very eerie mental imagery of the permanent state of epilepsy which projects a second personality, a second possibility, said that it would'[65]. The same image appears at the beginning of *The Nightingale Silenced* when Evans asserts that in this account her task is to give 'an outside inside story', one that is written from both sides of the door. Looking back on her life before the onset of the major seizures she says that she cannot remember a time when she was without 'moments of separation from [my] consciousness – moments when I was quite literally conscious and unconscious at the same time' (*RD* p.38). This paradoxical duality of the conscious/unconscious finds metaphoric expression in the door that can simultaneously be closed and open. The second personality is also a feature of these moments. She describes how sometimes these absences have occurred while she was crossing a room, leaving her with the sensation that she has left herself on one side and come to herself on the other. She calls this 'the two figures' idea and the 'moment of double bodiedness' and acknowledges its importance in her story (*RD* p.40).

Indeed, Evans's preoccupation with doors and doorways, connected with her experience of epilepsy, carries echoes of other liminal spaces which have had significance for her, and can perhaps be traced right back to her early fascination with the border country which inspired Ann's story in *Country Dance* and her own assertion 'I am the border'[66].

It will be apparent from the foregoing discussion that *A Ray of Darkness* is a book rich in metaphor and imagery, so it is a paradox that Evans should in this text again express her frustration that language is inadequate to convey her

[65] Ibid. p.50.
[66] NLW File 7, Gwyn Jones Letters, No. 16, Potacre March 6th 1946.

experiences. She reflects back on her attempts in *Autobiography* to communicate her deeply felt communion with nature:

> What is wrong with *Autobiography* is the strain, the intensity, the continuous effort to put into language what was in reality a deeply relaxing experience....The lapsing into quietude, which I failed to convey in Autobiography because it was words, was what saved me for so long (*RD* p.66).

'Quietude', a mystical state beyond words has, she feels, saved her for a time but now when the illness causes thoughts and impressions to rush in on her 'with an almost insufferable pressure' the 'relaxation in the Earth, which was what I tried and failed to describe in *Autobiography*, was impossible to me now...I was to regain it later, but only by dropping all attempts at writing of what interested me so much – the life of woods and fields' (*RD* p.76).

The 'quietude' she seeks is put to flight by language. As noted above, in Lacanian terms, the sign presupposes the absence of the object it signifies, so her sense of oneness with nature eludes her as soon as she tries to capture it in language[67]. In this sense it is pre-linguistic. Despite this, Nature still provides her with succour; between her first fit and its diagnosis:

> Earth *did* once again interpose its shoulder between suffering and myself. I never thought I should have a fit out of doors, and I never have....my long passion for earth-life and its study, was as healthy and protective, as spiritual, as any religion could be (*RD* p.88).

Her personification of Earth is significant: she perceives the earth as shielding her from harm as a mother would her child. However, as her condition becomes more acute, the power of nature to protect her diminishes.

Evans's experience of epilepsy is beyond language because it is a foretaste of the Real which, according to Lacan, is beyond signification,

[67] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* The First Complete Edition in English trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co, 2006), 392 p.326.

'Language is demanded by epilepsy, as by poetry, that simply does not exist; and no amount of agility can create it any more than tight-rope walking or dancing can create wings' (*RD* p.167)[68]. Tight-rope walking and dancing might give the impression that a person has wings; in the same way an 'agile' writer may give an impression of her seizures but it will be an illusion, an approximation of the reality of her suffering. Other writers have made similar observations. Woolf in *On Being Ill* blames 'the poverty of the language':

> The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry[69].

She says that the new language required by illness must be '...more primitive, more sensual, more obscene' [70]. These words suggest a language which is stripped back to something elemental, almost physical in that it would be a language of the senses. Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* takes this thinking on language a step further by asserting that:

> Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human makes before language is learned[71].

This accords with Lacan's suggestion that the experience of trauma involves an encounter with the Real, which is impossible to articulate: the traumatised individual is often rendered silent, thrown back to his or her first experience of helpless speechlessness[72]. A cry or a groan may be all that pain leaves us of language to describe the depths of suffering. The writer of a pathography must

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[68] Jacques Lacan, 'Tuché and Automaton', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (First pub. Éditions du Seuil, 1973; London and New York: Karnac, 2004), pp.53-67. See also Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.94.
[69] Woolf, pp.6-7.
[70] Ibid. p.7.
[71] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.4.
[72] See fn. 67.

accept this, as Evans does: 'A fit is almost impossible to describe accurately and imaginatively by the sufferer' (p.171). Yet at the same time she must use words, which are the only means she has to convey, if not the experience itself, her feelings associated with it.

There are many reflections on how best to do this in both *A Ray of Darkness* and *The Nightingale Silenced.* In the former, she disputes a 'twentieth century philosophical creed', which argues that there are no thoughts that cannot be defined in words. 'To me,' she says, 'that is to deny the essential nature of thought' (*RD* p.165). She suggests that 'abstract thought' and 'divine meditation' can be heard through the words of great poetry: 'The words of great poetry are indeed almost transparent' (*RD* p.166). She believes that great poets like Wordsworth thus have the ability to expand our minds beyond the medium they use. Here she suggests that the poetic sign stands for more than the signified; the relationship is less direct, more mystical – the sign is a transparent facilitator, opening up the mind to its own thoughts: 'Language can, however, in the hands of a master, suggest that greater, wordless language within from which mental and spiritual discovery issues' (*RD* p.167). This wordless language is the language she increasingly associates with her experience of epilepsy.

Again Virginia Woolf expresses something very similar in *On Being Ill.* She says that ill people turn to the poets[73] and that in illness

> ...words seem to possess a mystic quality. We grasp what is beyond their surface meaning, gather instinctively this, that, and the other – a sound, a colour, here a stress, there a pause – which the poet, knowing words to be meagre in comparison with ideas, has strewn about his page

[73] Woolf, p.19.

> to evoke, when collected, a state of mind which neither words can express nor the reason explain [74].

What Woolf describes here corresponds to Evans's sense that in poetry words can almost act as a conduit for meaning; they can be 'transparent', allowing the sensitive reader access to what otherwise would be inaccessible. Woolf also acknowledges that meaning, as Lacan recognised, could reside just as much in the pauses, the gaps between words as in the words themselves. For Woolf, the ill are freed from the intelligence which in healthy people 'domineers over our senses'[75]. The sick can

> ...creep beneath some obscure poems by Mallarmé or Donne, some phrase in Latin or Greek, and the words give out their scent and distil their flavour, and then, if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils, like some queer odour[76].

Poetry here takes on a quality which is paradoxically both ethereal and physical in its appeal to the senses. Evans makes a similar observation when she claims in *The Nightingale Silenced* that poetry is 'an element of life', alone in being 'capable of expressing the spirit'. It consists of 'selective and concentrated active phrases which are not necessarily verse but which flavour all the finest prose as the fruit flavours...the cordial'[77]. She considers that more than being merely a fit subject for poetry epilepsy 'is a kind of poetry' because: 'the aura and psychic state in which the patient lives and moves and acts...is mysterious profound and holy. It is a kind of dedication of the individual to the occult'[78]. Epilepsy is poetic in that it exists outside everyday human experience; it takes the sufferer into realms which are at once both other-worldly and intensely physical.

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[74] Ibid. p.21.
[75] Ibid. p.21.
[76] Ibid. pp.21-2.
[77] NLW, MS 23368B, p.88.
[78] NLW, MS 23368B, p.89.

The Divided Self

Anne Hunsaker Hawkins draws a convincing parallel between pathography and spiritual autobiography, the 'conversion narratives' popular in the 17th century. She argues that just as these stories of religious conversion reflected the cultural values of the time, so pathographies are grounded in contemporary secular, materialistic western society:

> Spiritual autobiography is an eminently suitable genre for a culture that sets a high premium on the status of the soul and devalues the body as, at best, a temporary and faulty vessel. Pathography, on the other hand, is appropriate to a more materialistic culture where the physical replaces the spiritual as a central concern, where the physician replaces the clergyman as the agent in the healing process, and where scientific laws replace religious dogma[79].

A Ray of Darkness is unusual in having elements of both pathography and spiritual autobiography. Evans introduces it as 'the story of my epilepsy...an adventure of body and mind' (*RD* p.12) and her doctors, therefore, play a prominent role as guides in the adventure, but on the other hand she also reflects on the causes of her sickness, in particular whether epilepsy is 'a religious or a moral disease' (*RD* p.97). Much of the text reads like a religious confession as she speculates about whether she might be to blame for her illness. 'Pain' has its etymological root in the Latin word 'poena', which means 'punishment' and Evans dwells on the idea that her epilepsy might be a punishment for sins in her past:

> There is, however, a strong morbid or puritanical tendency in me; this would tell me that I had committed some wrong, some mistake in my past life, for which I had to pay compensation. It might be an ethical sin, or a spiritual one, or an artistic one. My belief fastened finally on the last. It was the only interpretation: mentally I had defrauded my brain by physically occupying myself (*RD* p.86).

[79] Hawkins, p.32.

Her conviction, which mounts throughout the book, is that she has failed to give her writing the attention it deserves. This she describes as a 'sin' and her epilepsy is its consequence: 'I could not drive myself out of myself to write my novel. (That seems to me a sin to this day that I did not, for what was all the rest?)' (*RD* p.53).

The phrase 'drive myself out of myself' indicates Evans's sense of herself as consisting of different entities. This is implicit in the 'many mansions' image already discussed and is present in much of her earlier writing. She perceived herself as constituted of radically different people and referred to herself as such in her Journals and letters. As we have seen, she could be by turns Peggy Whistler, the artist whose illustrations appear in *Country Dance* and who created the frontispieces for her other novels; Margiad Evans, the author; Peggy Williams, wife and mother and Arabella, the lover.

Evans's experience of epileptic seizures in which brain and body are split, the body cast adrift from the brain's controlling impulses, seemed to her to confirm her sense of the parallels, divisions, contradictions and dualities which she had intuited all her life. More than this, in her case, she felt that the split in herself had actually contributed to the disease:

> I really contained two or more entities and that one was my neglected Genie or Muse, now turning on me as Apollo turned his rage upon his seer Cassandra. For I knew that I had betrayed my ideas for everyday life. I had had this knowledge in my brain for years - I had had my creative laziness on my conscience (*RD* p.173).

She conceptualises this split in terms of mind and body. The life of the mind, her intellectual life, has been sacrificed to her 'everyday life':

> I was an ordinary domestic woman by day, a poet or novelist or essayist by night. It was too much for me. The natural impulse to write when I

> wished for as long as I wished, might have caused the spilt which aggravated my tendency towards epilepsy (*RD* p.27).

At the end of the book she returns to the same idea:

> It was my conclusion at first that my divided sensations were due to what I can only describe as being several entities and that the split itself was the result of refusal to serve the artists' creative impulse as often or as devotedly as I could (*RD* p.177).

She continues this theme in *The Nightingale Silenced*, stating her belief that those who have a gift are vulnerable, that life attacks those with talent, especially those who have, as she thinks she has, betrayed that talent by living too much in the ordinary world, and failing to give themselves unreservedly to their writing[80]. She sees her essential self as separate from her body and it is this which is responsible for her illness: 'I have felt the causes of my disease are my fault more than my body's' (*RD* p.185).

She meditates repeatedly in the second half of *A Ray of Darkness* about whether the fits are symbolic of split personality or are evidence of a spreading of the self. This is a crucial question for her because it links back to, and potentially destroys, her vision, articulated in *Autobiography*, of unity between all life and its Creator:

> If I were a sufferer from split personality, my intermittent but lifelong 'visions' of unity were all delusions, and my belief in the Oneness of us all with the Oneness of God was only some physical contour of the brain (*RD* p.174).

Alternatively, and preferably for her, if the fits are an expression of her 'incoherent conviction' that 'it was possible to be where I was and be elsewhere at the same time' (*RD* p.179) then this might confirm her idea of unity: 'the one which is everywhere and the everywhere which is one' (*RD* p.179). She concludes this train of thought, 'A fit seems to me to be exactly that illustration

[80] NLW, MS 23368B, p.61.

which my instinctive and untrained psychic and mystic moments never brought me' (*RD* p.179).

At the beginning of *A Ray of Darkness* she describes a time immediately before the onset of the seizures when she felt 'all opposites being reconciled' in her brain and, '...all the world and myself becoming more and more to each other, while I was more and more of the natural Oneness I had sensed all my life and had tried so often to convey in *Autobiography*' (*RD* p.20). With the onset of the fits this certainty of oneness seems to be paradoxically both disrupted by her fears of split personality and at other times seizures seem to be confirmation of the mystic unity she had always sensed. In this way she writes *A Ray of Darkness*, 'this story of my brain is in fact the second part of *Autobiography* and belongs to it' (*RD* p.63). In a sense, *Autobiography* concentrated on the relationship between her body and the earth; now with the disruption in her brain making the split between brain and body clear, she uses *A Ray of Darkness* to continue the story and grapple with complicated notions of what the illness means to her perception of herself and her relationship to the world.

It seems clear that her sense of the disease as divisive of the self is much the strongest as images relating to splits and divisions proliferate. She relates how this idea is so dominant that everything reminds her of her condition, especially anything relating to deceit, counting or dividing:

> With *deceit* because the mind tries to deceive you that you are not going to have a fit when you are: with *counting* because (to me) it seemed until very recently that there were *numbers* of entities in me during the moments before I fell and with *division* for the same reason (*RD* p.171).

She reports an inability to count ingredients and a 'horror of dividing things' that she has never mastered: 'the idea of dividing or balancing anything causes an intellectual panic' (*RD* p. 172). This is understandable in the context of a life

that has demanded nothing but balancing and dividing: her domestic and creative self; the self that loved her husband and 'Arabella' in love with Ruth; English Peggy and Welsh Margiad, inhabiting the border country of Ross if not always physically, powerfully in her creative imagination. Her final conclusion is that her suffering is caused not by a split in one entity but the presence of several fighting for life:

> ...the term 'split personality' conveys no truth to me. It is not one being divided that causes the mental suffering and the physical collapse, but the presence within one brain, one body, one mind, of two or more complete entities. To use a simile of birth, the individual is not with child of Siamese twins but with unbound twins wrestling for the opening to life (*RD* p.181).

This image is powerful because of its intense physicality: her experience of a seizure is of two or more personas competing with each other for birth and survival. Attendant on images of birth is the suffering and splitting of the maternal body and the sense that the twins fighting for life are also the creation of that body; in the same way she feels she is responsible for creating the suffering which is tearing her body apart. The relationship between body and mind, which she describes, is complex and reciprocal. It is a paradox that the disease has had the effect of unleashing words on to the page; the book is its progeny.

Peter Wolf, an expert in epilepsy, points out that Evans's descriptions of 'double reality' are typical of sufferers' descriptions of temporal lobe seizures. Wolf also suggests that Evans's ability to create oxymora, a device combining two opposing concepts into one is linked to her experience of epileptic auras. Wolf claims that oxymora cannot be found in her earlier novels, but are notably present in *Autobiography* (1943) and the collection of short stories, *The Old and the Young* (1948). Wolf concludes that 'these probably reflect frequent auras

experienced during this period'[81]. Oxymora certainly feature in *A Ray of Darkness*, its title being the principal example. Others relate to light: 'dazzling darkness' (*RD* p.119) and 'sunny shadow' (*RD* p.112) and seem to spring from her experience of losing consciousness or being both conscious and unconscious at the same time. When Evans is forced to acknowledge that the fit was not an isolated experience and that seizures may recur she comments that from that time onward, light held 'patches of invisible blackness' (p.122).

In *The Nightingale Silenced* Evans attempts to describe exactly what this 'unearthly performance of the brain' feels like before the onset of a convulsion:

> The mental sensation was of sudden light upon the body, without heat, but which brought an abnormal distinctness not only to the faculties, but to the mental image within myself, which I, as everyone else, contain. I felt clearly seen. I felt as if a ray of pure daylight concentrated upon my body[82].

This paradoxical feeling of being the focus of intense light immediately before being overtaken by darkness, finds expression in the oxymora quoted above. While this particular literary expression of her perception of duality may be limited to the later work, as has been shown, duality is a theme traceable to her earliest writing both published and private.

Paradoxes and dualities are also evident in Evans's perception of God and religious intimations in *A Ray of Darkness*. For example, she observes that there was religion in *Autobiography* but it was incomplete; it was, 'the worship of nature and solitude, the worship perhaps of God's body and not the soul of God' (*RD* p.15). Just as *Autobiography* is dominated by her sense of the unity of her physical body with the earth so *A Ray of Darkness*, which she describes as

[81] Peter Wolf, 'Descriptions of Clinical Semiology of Seizures in Literature', *Epileptic Disorders*, 8 (2006), p.4.
[82] NLW, MS 23368B p.128.

the 'second part of *Autobiography*' and the 'story of her brain' (*RD* p.63), becomes a contemplation of the soul rather than the body of God.

She elaborates on this when she explains that the Nature mystic depends on bodily health and vigour to be able to respond to 'the breath of plant, wild and instinctive, life' (*RD* p.175) and she points to D.H. Lawrence and Richard Jefferies who became bitter and sad as they became old and ill. The alternative is for the 'spiritual or philosophical response' to grow as the 'physical force' declines; her example is her heroine, Emily Brontë. For such people, she says, there is development rather than loss.

For Evans, God and Nature have been one: 'God *is* Nature, to those who can discover Him...nowhere else' (*RD* p.58), and 'The God I would find....is Nature in Earth, and nature in us' (*RD* p.134). But in an apparently contradictory reflection she suggests that Nature is also the mother: 'But the discovery of God is the child finding that it can get its food elsewhere than from the mother. It is a weaning from, but not away from, the mother' (*RD* p.62). In the past, nature, Mother Earth has fed and nurtured her, but in *A Ray of Darkness* she identifies a different hunger asking whether there can be 'a connection between epilepsy and a spiritual hunger? Can it, in fact, be a religious disease which attacks the physical being?' (*RD* p.131). Could it be caused by the lack of a 'defined faith?' (*RD* p.131). The image of the epileptic as hungry and in need of spiritual sustenance recurs. Speaking of the epileptic sufferer she says, 'Either psychically, or spiritually or even religiously, he is hungry and he is not fed' (*RD* p.159). But her sense of a spiritual lack 'does not take the form of hunger for any formal religion. It is the personality, not the presentation of God' that she desires (*RD* p.181).

Her meditations on God are both consistent with the text's confessional tone and echo the dominant motif of the narrative which is the relationship between body and brain. Things of the mind, spirituality, mysticism concern her more as she becomes aware that the seizures which render her body aberrant and uncontrollable have their origin in a malfunction of her brain, which she names the 'stranger in the brain' (*RD* p.37). Thus she moves from a worship of 'God's body' to 'the soul of God' but she also perceives through her illness the profound and complicated relationship between body and brain and her yearning towards a deeper faith is driven by her conviction that epilepsy might be caused by past sins or a spiritual lack (p.180) which, if repented for and remedied, might lead to physical healing:

> The healer of Death, the world's greatest and most famous physician, the greatest doctor to mental maladies ever recorded, said to the sufferer of a nervous disease, on sight, 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee'. And in easing the spiritual strain, fulfilled the physical cure (*RD* p.132).

Warding off the Real: the Recreation of Identity

Many theorists of autobiography agree that in writing the story of the self, not only is that self elusive but its past is rearranged and even recreated in the telling. Hawkins discusses how 'the past is not simply recorded in the autobiographical act but given a structure, a coherence, a meaning'[83]. This must be borne in mind when Evans asserts the 'truth' of her account at the end of the introductory first chapter of *A Ray of Darkness*: 'It is the truth, most of it exactly as it was written down at that time, for I have my diaries' (*RD* p.12). However, even if the diaries can be relied on for authenticating the chronology of her experiences they can no more be relied on for 'truth' than any other text as the

[83] Hawkins, p.15.

self they articulate is just as vulnerable to recreation and reinvention. Hawkins suggests that pathography differs significantly from other forms of autobiography because it is about 'the self-in-crisis'[84]. Hawkins argues that readers of narratives describing illness and death are 'repeatedly confronted with the pragmatic reality and experiential unity of the autobiographical self. The self that is sick is in some way a concentration of other versions, fictions and metaphors, an essence, 'a "hard" defensive ontological reality'[85]. For the sufferer from epilepsy, however, the nature of the disease itself disrupts the sufferer's ontological reality. As I have already noted, Evans experienced her seizures primarily as a loss of self. Regaining consciousness after her first major seizure and failing to recognise her surroundings she asks herself, '*who was I?*' (*RD* p.80). This is repeated after another severe attack, 'I could not remember who or where I was' (*RD* p.152). This loss of self seems to her a rehearsal for death, a subject that had preoccupied her even before the onset of her last illness. She quotes Derek Savage, who in his analysis of *Autobiography* included in his book of critical essays, *The Withered Branch* (1950), points to 'the inner sadness, hollowness and final despair' of the 'nature cult' and the 'death wish' he discerns in her writing (*RD* p.63). She corrects him saying this was more of an obsession, which she has 'associated with epilepsy' (*RD* p.63). The falling into unconsciousness, she says, '...*can* teach. It can gently, and as it were, by steps or a staircase, show us the probable darkness of death, and remove our fear of that descent' (*RD* p.11).

In the desperate days following her first seizure, she turns again to nature for solace as she described in *Autobiography*, sensing that her 'long passion for

[84] Hawkins, p.17.
[85] Hawkins, p.17.

earth life and its study, was as healthy and protective, as spiritual, as any religion could be' (*RD* p.88), but although there is some comfort in the springtime it is not the same: 'Death, more death, had entered me through unconsciousness' (*RD* p.89). She quotes her journal entry for May 23rd 1950 where she reflects poignantly back to the time when her body had seemed to her a microcosm of the great earth with which she had felt such a close communion. Now she says the necessity of death seems natural to her because just as she had learned about 'natural life and death' from the great earth, now the little earth, her body, may reveal through 'its storms and physical complexes, the mystery of its cessation' (*RD* pp.92-3). The identification she makes between her body and the earth is strengthened by the use of the word 'storm' to describe her body's vulnerability, its complete passive subjection to the violent physical manifestations of the fit she has suffered.

Evans links body and earth again when she describes the slow return to consciousness after her first fit. There was 'a feeling that the soul didn't know whither it had returned, to the right earth or to an unknown one' (*RD* p.81). The idea of her soul returning to a body, which feels as if it might be alien territory, is a powerful metaphor for the dislocation she feels between body and mind.

In the journal entry for May 23rd she again links her experience of falling into unconsciousness with death:

> I don't think a lot about the other night now. The horror has certainly passed. I don't think it was a fit – oh I don't know! It might have been. But whatever it was physically – and it was total blackness, a hole in the self – to me, it was a glimpse. Some have them in visions, some in prayers, some come to them through entreaty, through disappointment, or weariness, some through sainthood. Death is the soul's delight. Death is God, Death grows to be our daily appetite. Give us our necessity (*RD* p.92).

Evans describes her experience in terms that go beyond the physical: the total darkness of the seizure created 'a hole in the self', which can be compared only to death. With the loss of the self in unconsciousness, she approaches 'the real' in the Lacanian sense of that which exists beyond or outside of meaning and signification. 'Nothing was seen' she says, but it was 'just the separation from the will, so entire, so instantaneous, so involuntary, that seemed to illustrate for me what is inevitable to come to be' (*RD* p.93). The seizures, which occur in a space beyond language, are a rehearsal for death: the ultimate truth. As she remarks in a contemporary letter, 'I know now and shall know again what it is not to exist.' (Letter to Bryher, October 26th 1950)[86].

Evans attempts to convey the paradox contained in the above statement, how it feels to know the unknowable, through vivid metaphors of vacancy and darkness. The second fit plunges her 'deeper into the darkness of epilepsy' (*RD* p.122). It occurs just as she is setting down a tray of morning tea by the bedside. She comes round to hear her husband telling her she has had another attack:

> With those words an amazement entered into me which has never left me. Ever since I have been incredulous of all things firm and material. The light has held patches of invisible blackness, Time has become as rotten as worm-eaten wood, the earth under me is full of trap-doors and the sense of being, which is life and all that surrounds and creates it, a thing taken and given irresponsibly and without warning as a child snatches a toy. Sight, hearing, touch, consciousness, torn from one like a nest from a bird (*RD* p.122).

Here she conveys a sense of the precarious state in which she now lives. All the things she depended upon - the earth, her senses, time and light - are now pierced with gaps and spaces which threaten to draw her in, to give way beneath her leaving her homeless, adrift and insecure.

[86] Yale, Bryher Papers.

She speaks about the effects of the seizures as creating 'numb patches' in her thought (*RD* p.81). When she is struggling back to consciousness, trying to remember who and where she is she reports that messages from her brain trying to bring her that information 'kept flashing to me and then fading again leaving blanks in my mind that were like the air under flight' (*RD* p.152). These blanks have the same paradoxical quality as air under flight: they are invisible, they appear to be static, empty spaces containing nothing but they are dynamic, powerful and freighted with significance. Evans tells her nurse, 'I'm sure I've had a fit because of the blanks in me' (*RD* p.153).

According to Lacan, our unconscious desire for our mothers reappears in the spaces between words. Words paper over the cracks, plug the gaps in our being: language is the way we manage loss. Deprived of speech by the seizures, Evans experiences a foretaste of the Real, that which is beyond language, but her experience of gaps and spaces in her self can be seen as the cracks reappearing when language is lost, manifestations of the unconscious desire which, according to Lacan, is at the centre of our lived experience.

This idea is reinforced by her sense of being haunted. That this was a powerful metaphor for Evans is illustrated by its frequent occurrence in the novels and in her journals[87]. Perhaps the sensation of being either possessed by an uncanny 'other' or of being on a borderline between life and death, was assimilated unconsciously from her early experiences of absence seizures. In the quoted diary entry for 23rd May, twelve days after her first seizure she writes:

> For several days afterwards if I turned my head quickly, something, some unusual, some significant shape seemed just to avoid me, just to run out of the corner of my eye...Maybe it would be a stone, a post,

[87] See Chapter 2, p.86 and Chapter 4, pp.176-9.

> which just one breath away had been a human shape, a ghost. The world was populated with vanishings (p.93).

Ghosts disturb our sense of a separation between the living and the dead so are appropriate companions for the sufferer from epilepsy, a condition which locates her in a liminal space where while alive she can experience the loss of consciousness which mirrors the negation of death. Like a ghost, she is both there and not there. The ghostly space, like the air under flight is another blank weighted with significance.

In *The Nightingale Silenced* Evans describes how she feels during the seizures, which have become much more frequent, '...it was as though a ghost walked through me, chilling with a faint draught every chamber of the body' [88]. Here the blanks she has described, the patches of blackness in the light, are represented as a ghostly figure wandering through the mansion of her body. The metaphor is effective because it conveys the fear of the sufferer. It also refers back to cultural ideas of epilepsy as possession and links to her sense that she is 'possessed by restlessness and vacancy' (*RD* p.90). 'Ghost' is the shape in which she sometimes conceives that vacancy. In a letter to her friend Bryher (26th October, 1950) she writes, 'It's like a ghost in yourself and say what commonsense will and mind doctors, you are haunted and you are different'[89]. As Virginia Woolf comments in her essay on Henry James's ghost stories, 'They (ghosts) are present whenever the significant overflows our powers of expressing it; whenever the ordinary appears ringed by the strange'[90]. Beth Torgerson discussing ghosts in *Wuthering Heights* comments that '...images of ghosts render visible "dispossession" and the powerlessness of the

[88] NLW, MS 23367B, p.41.
[89] Yale, Bryher Papers.
[90] Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays* vol. 1 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), p.291.

dispossessed'[91]. In Evans's case, her ghosts represent her sense that she no longer is in possession of herself.

The central paradox of *A Ray of Darkness* is that the disease that silenced her also unleashed words on to the page. Deprived of language, she responds by writing. Quoting from her diaries, she describes finding a mouse and her young while out gardening and then comments, 'I have a hope that it will help to straighten out the disorder in me if I write down such things as mice and thunderstorms' (*RD* p.90). And 'I must start again on my Emily Brontë book. I must do something to keep myself calm and decent' (*RD* p.87). She has a clear sense that writing might be her salvation and, despite finding it difficult, her output at this period was considerable. She wrote letters, articles, poetry and the journals which form the basis of *A Ray of Darkness*. Even as the disease progressed and the fits became more frequent she continued the narrative of her illness in *The Nightingale Silenced*, which exists in several manuscripts hand written compulsively, while confined to bed in hospital in Tunbridge Wells. Reading these narratives gives the sense that, by writing, Evans is attempting to impose order on her world threatened by chaos.

Arthur Frank writes of 'chaos stories' as a type of pathography. He points to a difficulty with this type of narrative, which is the impossibility for those who are living in chaos to narrate it because the necessary reflective grasp and distance are absent, 'the chaotic story cannot be told, but the voice of chaos can be identified and a story reconstructed'[92]. In these reconstructed stories, life is imagined as never getting better. *A Ray of Darkness* certainly conforms to this description. At the opening of the last chapter, which she dates December 30th

[91] Beth Torgerson, *Reading the Brontë Body: Disease, Desire and the Constraints of Culture* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p.16.
[92] Frank, p.98.

1951, she describes how she has entered a state of 'miserable impatience and mental velocity' similar to the one which tormented her for so many years before when 'the great wave of the disease parted me perhaps forever from the land of normality' (*RD* p.181). She sees herself as marooned in the kingdom of the sick for all time. Chaos narratives also characteristically lack narrative order and coherent sequence. Evans's text moves backwards and forwards in time. 'I am not now writing chronologically,' she says, 'in the state which writing now induces in me, it is doubtful if I could' (*RD* p.112). She describes the act of trying to capture her thoughts in writing as chaotic: 'I find that in writing so hurriedly my thought is flung down like water upon a floor and dashed in all ways at once and wasted without channel' (*RD* p.157). Her choice of image provides a link between her chaotic thought processes and the domestic physical life, which at times she has blamed for her disease: 'And once I thought it was the Muse herself in rage turning on one who had neglected her for years of common tasks and common existence' (*RD* p.11).

Although Frank notes this sort of hurry and repetitious jumble of words as typically employed by people attempting to convey their chaotic stories, he concludes that

> Ultimately, chaos is told in the silences that speech cannot penetrate or illuminate. The chaos narrative is always beyond speech, thus it is always lacking in speech. Chaos is what can never be told: it is the hole in the telling...chaos is the ultimate muteness that forces speech to go faster and faster, trying to catch the suffering in words[93].

Evans's thoughts spill out in a flood all over the floor because her writing is so hurried. She also records how, at the beginning of her illness, her diary is full of nature jottings, but these are suddenly interrupted by 'brief incomprehensible mental ejaculations, to which the key is lost' (*RD* p.110). She gives an example:

[93] Frank, pp.101-2.

> The black currants were ripe, the moon was thin, the summer house door was ajar...would I rather be me, sane, in the secret way Ophelia was? And like Ophelia, dragging wild flowers with her through the dew? But I didn't touch them – the mallow, the ox-eye, the – oh, I forget words' (*RD* p.110).

Here are 'holes in the telling' which even the author cannot fill and finally at the end of the entry a fading away into mute wordlessness. On the final page of the book, Evans asks what to do with this 'dark, restless, pining life' (*RD* p.190). But she expects no answer 'for my silent disease has no reply for me' (*RD* p.190). There is no hope of recovery or restitution of health. The end again is silence.

Continuing the same theme in *The Nightingale Silenced*, Evans records how in the minutes leading up to a fit she feels the urge to get out of bed, but she knows that she must not follow this urge because if she did, 'Things would disintegrate. I should be chaos'[94]. Chaos would not only constitute the horrific space she inhabits because of her disease she would actually become part of chaos herself. This vision of chaos almost renders her silent, but telling her story is her resistance to silence. The epileptic seizures interrupt her life and dislocate her sense of self but turning these experiences into a story is her attempt to neutralise the chaos. The imagined completeness of the story is made to substitute for her ailing, chaotic body.

Elaine Scarry points to the examples of Sophocles' Oedipus, Shakespeare's Lear and Beckett's Winnie, for each of whom 'the voice becomes a final source of self extension; so long as one is speaking, the self extends beyond the boundaries of the body, occupies a space much larger than the body' [95]. In the same way, Evans feels her body's unreliability and feared the

[94] NLW, MS 23368B p.132.
[95] Scarry, p.33.

disintegration of her mind so she, like Lear and Winnie, 'speaks' unceasingly and like them with great virtuosity, signifying her perhaps unconscious realisation that as long as she has a 'voice' she cannot be confined by the body's limitations. As Scarry says of Oedipus, Lear and Winnie, 'their ceaseless talk articulates their unspoken understanding that only in silence do the edges of the self become coterminous with the edges of the body it will die with' [96]. Echoing this, Evans writes on the opening page of *The Nightingale Silenced*, 'Illness is very like a longing to die. Yet there remains in me something obstinate, instincts which want to speak, to testify, to reason, to raise up myself'[97].

Frank suggests that the ill person not only loses a sense of herself but also loses the 'destination and map' that had previously guided their life[98]. In support of this he quotes a letter from Judith Zaruches, a sufferer from chronic fatigue syndrome, in which she writes, 'The destination and map I had used to navigate before were no longer useful'[99]. She now needed 'to think differently and construct new perceptions of my relationship to the world'[100]. One of the ways of doing this, Frank argues, is for the ill person to tell her story; the story itself then becomes part of the new map. *A Ray of Darkness* is Evans's story; its writing is performative in that it re-establishes the relevance of the old map and destination: that guiding Margiad Evans, poet and author. The importance of this map to her is conveyed in her letters to Bryher. Writing on February 23rd, 1951, and employing a similar metaphor, she says, 'Margiad Evans is lost and may never find her way back ever'[101].

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[96] Scarry, p.33.
[97] NLW, MS 23368B, p.1.
[98] Frank, p.1.
[99] Ibid. p.1.
[100] Ibid. p.1.
[101] Yale, Bryher Papers.

The circumstances in which she was writing this letter are crucial: she was in hospital, thirty-five weeks pregnant and suffering from oedema and a worsening of her epilepsy. *A Ray of Darkness* describes in parallel the birth of itself, the book, and her daughter, Cassandra. In her earlier autobiographical writing, she described the bringing forth of a book in intensely physical terms, writing of *The Wooden Doctor* that she wrought bones, muscles, a beating heart: a living book[102]. Writing, she gives birth to words and to herself through the text. A sense of her desperate struggle to give birth to herself through writing is expressed again ten years later in *Autobiography*, 'Each time I take hold of a pen it's like being born' (*A* p.24). This identification of herself with the body of her work, her corpus, is made explicit in her Journals of 1949. On August 6th, frustrated that she cannot write her 'great wild book' she says, 'But I have always been a silly diary, not a great book'[103], and on December 20th, 'I am a text of myself'[104]. But the text is not only herself, it is also her child; it is what she will leave behind after her death. In a letter to her husband, Michael, she refers to her recently published *Autobiography* which is dedicated to him, 'To you I owe *Autobiography* – it's more than dedicated it's our own child'[105]. *A Ray of Darkness* is an account of her illness, but it is also a narrative about the text's own birth and, in parallel, the birth of a flesh and blood child, her daughter, Cassandra.

The extent to which these two births are inextricably linked for her can be seen in the language she uses to describe her feelings about her pregnancy. In the letter quoted above where she feels afraid that 'Margiad Evans' may be lost she also writes, 'I think longingly of my dear unwritten book and the poems one

[102] NLW, MS 23366D, p.141. See discussion Chapter 2, pp.99-101.
[103] NLW, MS 41.
[104] Ibid.
[105] NLW File 12, Michael Williams Letters October 17th, 1944.

loves more than any flesh. And I think all lost if I die, and to die for this...' (Letter to Bryher, 23rd February 1951)[106]. Her priorities are clear: words mean more to her than flesh. Death in childbirth, even if this means giving life to a child would be no compensation for her lost words. She repeats this sentiment in *A Ray of Darkness* when describing her feelings when her pregnancy was confirmed:

> Triumph I did feel, inseparable from the fulfilment of the purpose for which I was a woman: but I confess that it was a lesser one than I had already had in finding a child in the womb of my brain (pp.120-1).

The book and the child are representatives of the split between the intellectual life and the domestic life that she feels may have led to her illness. She characterises this as a battle: 'the brain and the womb are enemy cities, and the inhabitants of them are born to strive with one another' (*RD* p.121).

Evans interprets the discovery that she has conceived a child, despite her illness, in terms of her body making a choice for life rather than death but she identifies as the child's twin rather than its mother: 'The woman who is carrying her child, although she feels an adult and maternal responsibility for it, and a charming friendliness towards it, is not as yet so much its *mother as its twin*' (*RD* p.120). Later in the text she refers to the baby as a 'mysterious twin'. This image reflects Evans's perception that she is involved in a double gestation: that of her child and herself embodied in a book. The twin imagery also echoes the central perception of her text that her illness, one that divides her body from her brain, has given her insight into the dualities and divisions that pervade her life. The image reappears in the final pages of her text where she offers her concluding insight into the nature of her disease: her suffering is caused by the presence within her brain, body and mind of 'two or more *complete* entities'

[106] Yale, Bryher Papers.

(*RD* p.181). 'To use a simile of birth, the individual is not with child of Siamese twins but with unbound twins wrestling for the opening to life' (*RD* p.181).

Linda Anderson suggests that '...one of the desires that is encoded by autobiography...is that of becoming, within the realm of the symbolic, one's own progenitor, of assuming authorship of one's own life'[107]. As I have shown above, *A Ray of Darkness* is about Evans's own rebirth as an author as well as the birth of her child. Evans was losing confidence that she would have time to grow old, so her book about birth is simultaneously a textual challenge thrown down against the silence of death, the Real. And these words are what might ensure her immortality; they allow her to cheat death by providing her epitaph.

She will live on also in her daughter, whom she named Cassandra. The significance of the name for her is illustrated by her use of it in a simile in which she identifies herself with the mythological Cassandra: her illness is a result of her 'Genie or Muse...turning on me as Apollo turned his rage upon his seer Cassandra' (*RD* p.173). She, like Cassandra, suffers at the hands of the beloved who believe themselves betrayed. There is another suggestive layer in her choice of name. Cassandra was cursed by Apollo so that her prophetic words would never be believed. For a woman whose whole existence centred on language, who *in extremis* turns to words, to name her daughter after a prophetess whose words were powerless reveals perhaps her most profound unconscious fear.

The final chapter of *A Ray of Darkness* is haunted by Evans's fear of annihilation. While in the process of writing the book her disease has taken a stronger hold and she returns to her voyage metaphor to express her conviction

[107] Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.67-8.

that 'the great wave of the disease [has] parted me perhaps forever from the land of normality' (*RD* p.181). From her position on the other side of the wave she reiterates her intimation of the possibility of being conscious and unconscious at the same time; both there and not there, when the epilepsy seizes her. In these final pages she concludes, 'The opposite of each thing makes the outline of the other' (*RD* p.185). Things are defined by what they are not, in the same way as Saussure theorised linguistic signs as having meaning only by virtue of their difference from other signs. The book's title, *A Ray of Darkness* refers to this central vision: 'for when is light so expressed as at midnight, or darkness so clear as at noonday?'(*RD* p.185).

A Ray of Darkness is a text which, in its insistence on a world characterised by ghosts, hauntings and divisions, paradoxes and ambivalence, perfectly articulates the absence and loss at the heart of language. 'To enter language is to be severed from what Lacan calls the "real", that inaccessible realm which is always beyond the reach of signification, always outside the symbolic order'[108]. The real, illuminated for Evans by her ray of darkness, is glimpsed by the reader through the silences in her text.

In this chapter I have argued that Evans's autobiographical and pathographical texts can be seen as a continuation of her fictional narratives in that her continuing aim is to construct her identity as writer, a project which becomes increasingly urgent as her illness worsens. The pathographies, when compared to *Autobiography,* illustrate at once a continuity of metaphoric thinking and the extent of the disruption to her sense of self, brought about by the onset of epilepsy. Applying Lacanian notions of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real offers insights into both her perception of oneness with

[108] Eagleton, p.145.

nature in *Autobiography* and her compulsive attempts to construct her identity through language; to defend herself from the Real as it encroaches upon her in fits which are like death[109]. In the next chapter, I will analyse Evans's final unpublished manuscripts to show how by writing about her memories she sought both to provide an epitaph for the author, Margiad Evans, and a legacy for her daughter.

[109] See Introduction p.20, fn. 71.

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Last words: *The Churstons* and *The Immortal Hospital*

In the years following the publication of *A Ray of Darkness* Margiad Evans's health continued to decline. By early 1956 her seizures had become so severe that she underwent an exploratory operation performed by a leading neurologist, Dr William Lennox, at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases in London. This revealed that her seizures, rather than being the result of a ruptured blood vessel caused by a childhood fall, proceeded instead from the presence of an inoperable tumour on her brain. She knew then what she had suspected for a long time: that her life would not be a long one.

Faced with this knowledge, Evans's reaction was, as ever, to write. An examination of the archive material reveals that she continued to write compulsively for as long as she was able, although the deterioration in her handwriting demonstrates the effects of the disease and the drugs prescribed in an attempt to control it. Her body was palpably failing, but the urge to commit words to paper did not leave her. There are letters, journals, poems, a radio script and the subject of this chapter: a new novella entitled *The Churstons* and a memoir of her childhood, *The Immortal Hospital*.

In 1957, a year before she died, Evans's submitted these latter texts to Pearn, Pollinger and Higham, with the suggestion that they be published together in a single volume, but they were rejected. The projected volume was to be dedicated to her daughter, Cassandra, born in 1951. When writing *A Ray of Darkness* she recorded how she had felt a greater triumph in finding a 'child in the womb of my brain'[1] than in knowing that she was to give birth to a flesh and blood child. Now her impulse is to link

[1] Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness* (London: Arthur Barker, 1952; repr. London: John Calder, 1978), p.121.
Further references to the John Calder edition are given after quotations in the text (*RD*).

the two by dedicating her brain's final issue to her small daughter. There are several versions of both texts in the archive. For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer mainly to the versions she submitted for publication (NLW, MS 23363C and NLW, MS 23369C). These are the most complete and they are the texts that Evans wanted to leave for posterity.

The Churstons and *The Immortal Hospital* are interesting for this study because, following on from *The Nightingale Silenced,* they show how when threatened with corporeal disintegration Evans continued to write as a way of reaching out into the world, beyond the limits of her sick body. In these texts the issues that are at the heart of her earlier work reappear: the relationship between fact and fiction; identity, body and language; and, in addition, the function of memory. In previous chapters, I have analysed the complex ways in which she implicates herself in her texts and how they relate to her life events. *The Churstons* and *The Immortal Hospital* were written in the context of her discovery that her life expectancy was severely limited and that in all likelihood her cognitive powers would be affected before her death. Her response to this, as to previous traumas, is to write, but now part of her project is to meditate once more on who she is, specifically how the child that she was has become the unhappy and afflicted adult whose memories she writes.

The neurologist Dr Oliver Sacks, working with patients suffering from memory loss, came to the conclusion that narrative is a defining constituent of selfhood: 'We have, each of us, an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a "narrative", and that this narrative is us, our identities'[2]. He also notes that there is always an attempt by a damaged individual 'to restore, to replace, to compensate for and to preserve its identity, however

[2] Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (London: Picador, 1986), pp.116-7.

strange the means might be'[3]. In Evans's case, when her sense of herself is threatened by epileptic seizures, she attempts to restore the continuity of her life narrative by constructing texts which aim to show the links between the child she was and the adult she has become.

In this chapter I will analyse *The Churstons* and *The Immortal Hospital*, looking at the problems they present as texts and what each has to say about writing and the book. I will look at how each deals with the body and its suffering and most importantly how Evans continues in her writing not only to construct her identity, but also crucially to hold together her fragmenting sense of herself, a condition exacerbated by her seizures in which communication between mind and body fails.

The Churstons

The book: problems of genre

The typescript of *The Churstons* sent to the publishers consists of one hundred and twenty three pages of what appears at first sight to be a novella, but the direction of the narrative shifts with first of all references to a character called Margiad Evans and then the intrusion of Evans herself into the narrative. At this point (p.99), there is a change from third to first person narration as the writer's memories take precedence over the fictional story she has been telling. Evans implicates herself still further in the text because the fictional story of the Churston family, like *The Wooden Doctor*, has elements of 'aesthetic autobiography'[4].

The Churstons opens with the epigraph, 'Not quite every character is a living person in this story. And not quite the reverse'[5]. The sociologist, Ann Oakley, opens her autobiography with similar words: 'Some of the characters in this book are real and

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[3] Sacks, p.6.
[4] Nalbantian, p.43.
[5] Margiad Evans, *The Churstons* NLW MS 23363C.
Further references to this manuscript will be given after quotations in the text (*Ch*).

some aren't'[6]. The effect of such a statement is to disrupt what Philippe Lejeune has called the 'autobiographical pact' between reader and writer by suggesting that what follows can neither be taken confidently as fact or fiction; the boundaries are blurred[7]. In *The Churstons,* Evans follows her epigraph with a List of Characters, thus seeming to indicate that what follows is fiction, but as with the earlier novels, this again is obfuscation for as early as the second page the narrator asserts that her story 'is not a crime story, not a love story, not a novel, but a remembrance' (*Ch* p.2). The List of Characters is also incomplete as it only names five of the six siblings we are told about on the first page and, significantly, it does not include 'Margiad Evans'. Here, then, we seem to be being offered fiction, but Evans could be said to disrupt the 'fictional pact' by implying in her epigraph that some of the characters in what follows are 'living' people.

It is likely that Evans had several different families in mind when she created the Churstons. Her father, Godfrey Whistler, had nine siblings, but it was her mother's family who came from Buckinghamshire, the location of the Churstons' country home. Evans's husband, Mike, also came from a large family which included several eccentric aunts and uncles.

The story of the Churstons is 'the uproariously tragic history' (*Ch* p.2) of a 'bizarre' (*Ch* p.12) family of eight siblings, only six of whom survive: Basil and Guy and two sets of sisters Adelaide and Edith; Thomasina and Elsie. The family divides its time between a house in Albemarle Street, London, and a farm thirty-three miles away in Buckinghamshire, called Elm Flowers, 'set in deep cherry orchards' (*Ch* p.2). The pairs of sisters travel fortnightly between the two houses, exchanging places. Self-confessed eccentrics (*Ch* p.9), each pair of sisters includes one who is clever but

[6] Ann Oakley, *Taking it Like a Woman* (London: Cape, 1984), Author's Note.
[7] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.5.

physically plain, Adelaide and Thomasina, and another who is beautiful, Edith and Elsie. Adelaide is the most intelligent of the sisters: 'Adelaide, Guy and Basil had good brains, imaginative and intellectual, but Edith's, Elsie's and Thomasina's were merely mature and practical' (*Ch* p.4). Although paired with Adelaide, Thomasina's intellect is inferior to Adelaide's who more resembles her brother: Adelaide is imaginative rather than practical. As a consequence of their differing abilities, Edith and Elsie are the ones who have to do the cooking and wait at table, while Adelaide writes. Adelaide, with her intellectual capacities, her writing and her plainness is an echo of both Arabella in *The Wooden Doctor* and Phoebe in *Turf or Stone*; like them, she is another of Peggy's alter egos, one of whose messages, this time addressed directly to her daughter, is that a woman should not expect to be both pretty and intelligent. However, the narrative also reveals that plainness is not necessarily incompatible with sexual allure; Adelaide has her admirer and stoutly articulates her conviction that having a 'mind' compensates for any lack of physical beauty (*Ch* p.13).

The tone of the opening pages is light. The reader is invited to enjoy the family's eccentricities: the fortnightly journey of the sisters with all their pots and pans and pets; their shopping habits which are remarkably aggravating to the shop assistants in Harrods; and the antics of Polly Prott the parrot, purchased in a bout of 'sheer "Churstonism"' (*Ch* p.4). However, the tone changes abruptly on p.5 when we learn that 'in the very old and very distinguished family tree there was an ancient black bough. That bough was hereditary suicidal mania'. Later, we learn of the deaths of two other sisters, one from suicide, and 'the family muse of madness' (*Ch* p.8).

The siblings' reaction to this, encouraged by their doctor brother Guy, is to take an oath of celibacy. If they become extinct then they will stamp out forever their inherited disease. The narrative describes how the sisters keep to the terms of their pact, despite being courted by suitors. Adelaide's eccentric appearance is attributed to the twenty

years she has 'resisted her love for the now extremely famous neurologist, Professor Luchiardi' (*Ch* p.14). Later in the narrative, Adelaide recalls how she sent Professor Luchiardi away despite his desire to be with her, knowing they could not have children (*Ch* p.16).

It can be seen from this brief summary that in this fiction Evans returns to themes which have preoccupied her in earlier works and others which have specific bearing on her contemporary predicament. Adelaide, the plain intellectual, conceives a lifelong unconsummated passion for a doctor much older than herself; she was fifteen when they fell in love. Towards the end of the narrative Dr Luchiardi, now eighty and married (his wife has her name crossed through in the List of Characters to be replaced with 'a nobody'), revisits Elm Flowers and reminisces about the time years ago when Adelaide had called him 'the wild professor' (*Ch* p.75). These details suggest that in the character of Professor Luchiardi and his relationship with Adelaide, Evans is conflating three of the loves of her own life: Dr Dunlop with whom she fell in love as an adolescent, a theme obsessively reworked in *The Wooden Doctor*; her 'Professor', Basil Blackwell who, in the journals of the mid 1930s, she describes as her ideal man; and Professor Golla, her neurologist, with whom she carried on an affectionate correspondence in the 1950s.

Adelaide, like her creator, takes refuge from her unhappiness in writing. Indeed we are told that 'only when writing poetry to Luchiardi's memory did she entirely forget him, so mysterious and inverted is art' (*Ch* p.58). Thinking about the language and the metre of the poem blots out the misery which is her subject. The same sentiment is expressed in Evans's journals for October 1939 when she was tormented by her confused feelings for both Mike Williams, who would become her husband, and Ruth Farr: 'I write all this <u>because I want to forget it</u> – I always write what I want to be rid of. <u>It can't be real</u> – they must be the delusions of imagination both vile and

pitiable'[8]. This can also be read as her rationale, albeit unconscious, for converting her experiences into aesthetic autobiography. In order to forget emotions and events which seem too extreme and upsetting to be real, she can convert them to fiction and so distance herself from them, if not forget.

In *The Churstons,* during an argument between the siblings about what had actually happened between Adelaide and Professor Luchiardi to cause him to leave her, Guy recommends that the place for scenes of heightened passion is not real life: '"You don't live like that, you put it in a book"'(*Ch* p.52). Evans, writing in her diary at the time of the publication of *The Wooden Doctor,* remarked that the suffering caused by her unrequited passion for Dr Dunlop was worth it because out of it had come her 'living' book. Writing, for both Adelaide and her creator, is a refuge from violent emotion, but more importantly, it allows the individual to construct for herself an identity, that of the 'writer'. A further indication of the importance of this to Evans is found in a handwritten marginal note within the typescript of *The Churstons*: describing Adelaide after Luchiardi's death, she 'has no letters, no photographs, no professional partnership, to give her posthumous comfort. [Added in biro] But she wrote' (*Ch* p.111).

Like her creator too, Adelaide is afflicted by illness, an illness that disrupts her relationship with nature. She ends her life in a nursing home, 'crippled' (*Ch* p.105). After suffering from a stroke she has to be taught to write with her left hand. Forgetting that Professor Luchiardi is dead, she writes him a long letter in which she laments her loss of hope and communion with the earth that she had worshipped, 'But the earth hasn't ripened, it has withered. There is nothing! All joy is gone' (*Ch* p.123). This sentiment appears in another draft of *The Churstons,* which is written in the first person and seems to be self-referential. Here the narrator speaks of the world visibly fading,

[8] Margiad Evans, *Arabella's Voice* NLW, MS 23577C, p.117.

'like a branch torn off a tree in a gale. It had less and less meaning'[9]. It is clear that this reflects Evans's own perception of loss. When faced with an increase in the severity of her seizures, she writes in *The Nightingale Silenced*, 'I knew there was to be no comfort, no strength to be drawn from nature. Somehow the association had been severed...and because nature and weather and landscape had failed I knew everything had'[10].

Adelaide also reflects another sorrow and anxiety of Evans; the possibility that writing itself may fail as a mode of communicating the self beyond the mortal constraints of the body. Adelaide lives on for years; her letter is left unsigned and undelivered. After her death 'an ill-written word' is found at the bottom of the letter, 'which might have been "courage" or "all rubbish". Nobody knew or cared which' (*Ch* p.123). The reader is deprived of an insight into Adelaide's state of mind at the end because this word cannot be deciphered, but worse than that, nobody cares. The meaning is clear; the word fails to convey the body's final message. This anxiety about the success of her writing surfaces even more explicitly in negative references to Evans's own writing in the text. One of the Churstons receives a letter from Margiad Evans 'who writes...so badly' (*Ch* p.12); later, after the switch to first person narration, she writes, 'I do write, but only prose, and my books are not a success' (*Ch* p.102). These comments, together with the final lines of *The Churstons*, betray her fear that the world will be heedless or uncomprehending of her words after she has gone.

The Suffering Body

Another theme familiar from the earlier texts is that of illness: the plot of *The Churstons* revolves around the pact made by the siblings to allow the family to die out

[9] Margiad Evans, *The Churstons* NLW MS 21 (No page numbers).
[10] Margiad Evans, *The Nightingale Silenced* NLW, MS 23367B, p.39.

'rather than pass on to descendants the hereditary suicidal mania which took at least one from each generation'[11]. The spectre of heritable disease clearly haunted Evans. In *Creed,* Florence Dollbright, suffering from breast cancer, consoles herself with the thought that being childless she cannot pass the disease on to the next generation [12]. In *A Ray of Darkness,* Evans describes her family's reluctance to accept her diagnosis of epilepsy; they are 'unbelieving' and the implication is that this is because they cannot accept that they too might be tainted, 'It is natural that one's blood relations should not welcome a disease such as epilepsy into their circle' (*RD* p.98*).* Finding herself pregnant after the onset of her epileptic seizures and fearing that her disease may indeed be hereditary, she anguishes over whether a termination might be preferable to the possibility of passing the disease on to her child: 'My horror of the twist in my brain, of its possible inheritance by my baby, may have made it *seem* that I was anxious not to bear it' (*RD* p.125). What follows is a month of uncertainty as she waits for the advice of her doctors and debates the options with herself. Finally, Professor T tells her that the child should live because he assures her that she is not suffering from a hereditary type of epilepsy (*RD* p.129).

In *The Churstons,* dedicated to the child whose very existence rested on the slim thread that her mother's epilepsy had been diagnosed as being non-hereditary, Evans confronts the possibility that she might too have chosen to be childless in order to avoid passing on tainted blood. The disease that besets the Churstons is portrayed as a kind of madness; it is a disease of the brain, like epilepsy, which manifests itself in the urge towards self-destruction, towards non-being, a state which Evans had experienced in her seizures. The siblings' drastic solution is to punish the body by denying passion and prohibiting procreation. However, this was evidently not the choice made by Evans. Her daughter, Cassandra, born in March 1951, must have been conceived only a few weeks

[11] Margiad Evans, *The Churstons* NLW, MS 19, p.7.
[12] Margiad Evans, *Creed* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), p.62.

after her first major seizure in May, 1950. It seems that in *The Churstons* Evans is working through the implications of her choice, perhaps also demonstrating to Cassandra that she, unlike the afflicted Churstons, has nothing to fear: the fact of her existence demonstrates that she is not the carrier of hereditary disease. Evans also, in the character of Adelaide, considers what might have been her fate if she had not chosen passion and motherhood. Adelaide spends her life sublimating her passion for Luchiardi by writing poor poetry dedicated to his memory while Luchiardi marries someone else and cannot even remember which of the Churston sisters he was once in love with. I suggest that the double shocks of the seizure in May 1950, and finding herself pregnant only a few weeks later after ten years of marriage, together with her family's negative reaction to her diagnosis and the anxiety about whether an abortion would be necessary, all contribute to a 'trauma story' in which, in Suzette Henke's formulation, 'what cannot be uttered might at least be written – cloaked in the mask of fiction or sanctioned by the protective space of iteration that separates the author/narrator from the protagonist/character she or he creates'[13].

Evans, knowing that her future will be limited by her disease, uses the Churstons to investigate what effect this realisation has on an individual's perception of the past. Deprived of a stake in the future by their pact of celibacy, Basil remarks, '"Why bother with the past when we have no future?"' (*Ch* p.13). Despite agreeing that for them the past is irrelevant, many of the conversations between the siblings revolve around their memories.

The ability to remember in this novella is markedly linked to place. Thus when they reminisce about the deaths of their sisters at Elm Flowers, Adelaide tells Basil that he will not be able to remember those events while he is in Albemarle Street (*Ch* p.8). While in the Home Orchard at Elm Flowers, Adelaide remembers that this was the spot

[13] Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.viii-xix.

where she had dismissed her lover, Professor Luchiardi, in order to keep her promise that she would remain celibate. She repeats the word 'go' until she feels she has 'exorcised the spot' and can move on (*Ch* p.16). Again memory is firmly linked to a specific place. Later in the narrative, the Professor feels compelled to return to Elm Flowers; in order to make sense of his past he has to return to the scene of his memories.

The Churstons, deprived of a future, spend time with their memories. The significance of memory is further stressed through Guy, the doctor and instigator of the pact, whose defining characteristic is his remarkable memory, which he fears is breaking down. 'Now memory was Guy: such a thing had never happened before, and he thought all kinds of fantastic thoughts would rush in to take the place of his remembered existence' (*Ch* p.54). He remembers vividly the night he and his siblings made their pact of celibacy, but one fact escapes him: 'In what room did the Pact take place?'(*Ch* p.56). His failure to recall this one fact persuades him that he is ill and that he must leave Albemarle Street and set out for Elm Flowers the next day. The suggestion is that by returning to Elm Flowers, the place where the siblings made their pact, his remembered existence, on which his sense of self seems to depend, will be restored.

It is significant that the narrative voice changes in the section of the text dealing with Guy and Evans now appears as 'I'. She describes Guy's bedroom in Albemarle Street which is filled with books, 'I mean literally filled for when I, as a young woman, once stayed an odd night in that house, Guy was away and I slept in his room' (*Ch* pp.53-4). The fact that Evans's own memory surfaces and intrudes into her text as her character's sense of ontological security is threatened indicates her close identification with her subject matter. Her repeated concern with memory in this text strongly suggests that she was afraid that as her neurological condition deteriorated she would

lose her 'remembered existence' and, like Guy, fall prey to 'fantastic thoughts'. Like her characters, she seeks deliverance from this fate and from the resulting loss of a sense of who she is by returning in memory to significant places from her past as I will show.

Identity: Childhood and the significance of place

It is at points in the narrative dealing with the significance of place in the Churstons' memories that the voice changes and 'I', Margiad Evans, appears. Both Albemarle Street and Elm Flowers were loci of memory, not just for Evans's characters, but also for herself. This suggests that, as she was writing about them, her own memories surfaced so strongly that she was no longer able to maintain the distance of fiction. The reason for this is that Evans's identity was so strongly linked to place. I have analysed the significance of the border as the setting of her first novel; her other three novels are all set in the area around Ross-on-Wye. *Autobiography* is in part a meditation on her relationship to special, significant places. In both *The Churstons* and subsequently in *The Immortal Hospital* Evans constructs her identity in relation to childhood memories linked to specific places.

In *The Churstons* Evans's childhood memories are prefaced by a second memory of Albemarle Street. Like the first, this is drawn from her experience as an adult of staying in Albemarle Street with her sister, Sian:

> Every Churston is alive. It is at this period that I begin to know them, for their toleration of me as my mother's crazy daughter has become something warmer and they sometimes invite me and my sister Sian to Albemarle Street when we are routing [sic]out publishers (*Ch* p.99).

That this narrative is self-referential is confirmed by the reference to Sian, which was the name Evans conferred on her sister, Nancy. In her journals, Evans often writes of Sian rather than Nancy; Nancy's copy of *Creed* also bears the inscription, 'Sian

Evans from her sister Margiad'[14]. This dedication also refers to the sisters' visit to London in March-April 1934 where, from the contemporary journals, it is known that they were 'routing out publishers'[15].

At this point, the direction of the narrative changes and the representation of the writer's memories, conjured initially by her story of the Churstons, now takes precedence over their tragic history:

> Memories of our very early childhood begin to mingle with the Churstons at this stage. One moment, as I write, I seem to be sleeping with Sian...a grown up young woman; the next I am a baby girl in a pinafore at one of the famous 'cherry parties'. I will try to take these disorderly memories in sequence (*Ch* p.99).

Elm Flowers is based on Brawlings Farm in Chalfont St Peter, Buckinghamshire, near Evans's birthplace, and the area where she spent the first nine years of her life before the family moved to Herefordshire[16]. In the late 1940s, Nancy with her husband and son moved back to Chalfont St Peter and Evans stayed with her for some months in 1949 after she and Mike lost their home in Herefordshire. During this period, just over a year before her first seizure, feeling ill and saddened by the move from the area to which she had grown so attached, Evans records in her journal revisiting Brawlings Farm and finding comfort in the area where she had lived as a small child:

> I feel a child.....as if something quiet were welling up through my feet from the grass...it seems something in the form of a dim recollection is moving in me and my eyes search the summer level of the fields for a corner – some trees – a roof – an orchard that means childhood again (June 7th 1949)[17].

In *The Churstons* Evans presents the reader with a complex double memory; she remembers both her early childhood and she remembers herself revisiting Brawlings (represented as Elm Flowers) in 1949 searching for and trying to preserve her memories.

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[14] See Appendix.
[15] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 23366D, pp.171/31-2.
[16] Evans's nephew, Jim Pratt, confirms that Brawlings Farm was the model for Elm Flowers.
[17] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 41.

The first of the memories of Elm Flowers takes the writer back to early childhood; it is a memory of sitting in a pushchair in the cherry orchard with her mother and sisters. The writing is vivid and sensuous, recalling the nature writing in *Autobiography*: 'The trees are pink or purplish black with fruit and their leaves droop. Great wicker baskets full of cherries as shiny as beads stand against the tree-trunks' (*Ch* p.99). She has detailed memories of the food, recalling meringues 'white as tablecloths stuck together with yellow cream.' She remembers the spaniel, Brownie, and the horse, Honeymoon, and Basil playing with the dog. Most significantly she remembers 'the essentially ecstatic nature of the afternoon, its specialness, its beauty, its preciousness. And above all that eternal feeling of being which the brightest memories of childhood never lose in a lifetime, however long or sad' (*Ch* p.100). It seems to me that these bright, undimmed memories represent for Evans times when she felt most vividly alive and recalling them, recalls that sensation. Implicit, in view of her deteriorating health, is a comparison with the moments of non-being experienced during her seizures. In *A Ray of Darkness,* Evans describes her fits as 'blanks in me' (*RD* p.153); 'a hole in the self' (*RD* p.92) and 'numb patches in my thought' (*RD* p.81).

There is a striking parallel between Evans's perception here and Virginia Woolf's memories of childhood in *A Sketch of the Past.* Both are linked strongly with place and with a feeling of ecstasy which arises from a sensual response to that place. Woolf's equivalent of Evans's cherry orchards are the gardens in St Ives which '...gave off a murmur of bees; the apples were red and gold; there were also pink flowers; and grey and silver leaves'[18]. For Woolf, lying in bed in the nursery at St Ives hearing the waves breaking on the shore is the earliest and most important of all her memories[19]. She says, 'If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and

[18] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* Introduced and revised by Hermione Lee (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.80.
[19] Ibid. p.78.

fills – then my bowl without a doubt stands on this memory' [20]. Woolf goes on to describe how she perceives her days as divided between moments of being and moments of non-being; it is the moments of being that remain as memories[21], just as for Evans the 'brightest memories of childhood' contain the 'eternal feeling of being', the brighter still because of the traumatic moments of non being experienced as a result of her epilepsy.

Evans is drawn away from her fictional story of the Churstons and towards memories of childhood because of a need to make a connection with the child she had been. I have already argued that Evans's deepest self perception, even before the onset of major epilepsy, was of a self that was fragmented and divided: English/Welsh; artist/writer; writer/wife and mother; wife of Mike/lover of Ruth. A further division, articulated in the journals, is between herself as a child and the adult she becomes. An entry from Evans's journal for April 1934, over twenty years earlier, demonstrates that this was a deep-rooted idea. The entry records a visit with Basil Blackwell to Uxbridge, where she was born, and juxtaposes a memory of being a little girl with an egg in a spoon on the grass with herself now talking to her publisher:

> The same person, exactly the same being, as the freezing young woman with her shoulders wrapped in a rug....It was a difficult obscure feeling almost impossible to describe, depressing to experience. The nearest thing to it would be if every bud in the garden had suddenly become a full blown flower beneath our eyes, and even then there would be no twenty years in a second. I might have been there yesterday, a child: I was there today a woman. Voilà tout[22].

The difficult, obscure feeling is caused by her sense of time inexplicably lost. There is a gap of twenty years between the child and the adult, which like time lost in the absence of a seizure, has disappeared forever leaving a sense of sadness and loss.

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[20] Ibid. p.78.
[21] Ibid. p.84.
[22] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 23366D, p.32.

Eakin argues that in the autobiographical process 'materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness'[23]. Evans's need at the point of writing *The Churstons* is to find some kind of continuity with her past, a link between the child that was and the adult who is writing. With her intimation of a life foreshortened, she also needs to recapture the child's feeling of a boundless future: the first person narrator in *The Churstons* articulates this as 'that feeling of eternity which is childhood's privilege haunts me, and I sit both remembering and looking forward to my life at the same time' (*Ch* p.101).

In *A Ray of Darkness* Evans laments that 'the trust which normal people rest in their own continuity has left me' (*RD* p.182). That part of Evans's project in *The Churstons* was to recover a sense of continuity is shown by her decision to include not only childhood memories, but also memories of her return to Elm Flowers/ Brawlings as an adult as described in the 1949 journal. In an entry for July 19th 1949, she describes visiting the farm with Nancy and her little son, Tom. Her description is very close to the one which emerged a few years later in *The Churstons*; she notes in her journal, 'The smell of the bruised tree, the leaves and squashed cherries and hidden boughs' (July 18th 1949)[24].

The Churstons also includes a memory of the narrator's visits to the cherry orchard as an adult:

> Elm Flowers became myself, a self so dear that now when all the Churstons are dead and the farm sold I sneak round with a pen and block and make a drawing of it as it was, before any alterations can spoil it. Also a pair of scissors to snip off cuttings of Edith's red roses: every one of which lived and bloomed in my sister Sian's garden (*Ch* p.100).

[23] Eakin, (1985), p.5.
[24] NLW, MS 41.

It could be that this drawing is the one which survives (see Appendix)[25]. Evans's attempt to possess Elm Flowers, to fix it in the memory by means of a physical memento, was an important element in her remembering. The drawing and the rose allow a sense of continuity with the past and mitigate her sense of loss.

While there are moments in *The Churstons*, notably Evans's childhood memories of the cherry parties, that are vividly realised, the impression left by the whole is of a text that lacks coherence and an integrated vision. The shifting narrative perspectives are disconcerting; the Churstons and their story fail to convince. The ending, in which nobody knew or cared what Adelaide's last words were, indicate that the author was aware that her failing faculties were affecting the power of her words to have any lasting impact. In a letter to Bryher written just after the publication of *A Ray of Darkness* and before *The Churstons*, she foresees this decline:

> I dread the future. The doctor says this dreadful power that shakes my brain will not impair it. But something is. If not the illness it is the drugs. I am so thankful that before the gift left me, this last effort was made and dedicated to you. For I think it will be the last. The earth fades daily (1st September, 1952)[26].

The Churstons and *The Immortal Hospital,* as well as *A Nightingale Silenced*, are the evidence that, despite feeling the effects of her illness, she continued making the effort to write. In *The Immortal Hospital* she makes the wise decision to build on the most successful aspect of *The Churstons* and continue to write about her childhood memories. Given the sub title '*Recollections of our Childhood*', the result is a more coherent, integrated narrative.

[25] Jim Pratt has kindly given permission for a drawing of the farm by his Aunt Peggy to be included in the Appendix. The drawing is marked Brawlings Farm 1948, a year before the period Evans spent living with her sister, Nancy, in Chalfont St Peter, so it must have been drawn on an earlier visit.
[26] Bryher Papers. General Collection. Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The suffering body

In her last years, Margiad Evans spent long periods in hospital, but none could cure her; she died in the Kent and Sussex hospital in Tunbridge Wells on her 49th birthday, 17th March 1958. In the last year of her life, Evans attempted to find healing by writing about an 'immortal hospital': 'the remembrance, whole and in parts, of my uncle Donavan's farm in Herefordshire'[27]. Situated by the 'rushing red river', this was the place which haunted her imagination from first seeing it aged nine until her death, far away from Herefordshire, forty years later.

The memories recorded in *The Immortal Hospital* relate to two periods Evans spent at Benhall Farm on the Monmouth-Herefordshire border with her Aunt Nan and Uncle Douglas. In her narrative Evans changes the names: Aunt Nan becomes Fran; Uncle Douglas becomes Donavan and Benhall, Hill Hall. The Whistler family's removal from Buckinghamshire, the location of Elm Flowers/Brawlings, to Herefordshire was occasioned by Evans's father, Godfrey, being compelled to resign from his job in 1918 because of his 'continual illness' (*IH* p.16), probably related to alcoholism. His family then spent two unsettled years staying with various family members before in 1920 settling in Bridstow near Ross-on-Wye, just up the road from Benhall.

Benhall/Hill Hall is the immortal hospital to which Evans can return in her memory as an escape from her suffering:

> When lying awake, half teased by sleep or by my disorder or the horrible associations this disorder has brought. When burnt by sorrow and hollowed by pain, when all the misery and narrowness of that nature which is often a writer's makes me writhe like a snake over my own length of self which I have collected behind me, at moments I can still be little Margiad at Hill Hall, if I try. Memory does not repose there ordinarily...but memory can be sent back by deliberate will (*IH* p.37).

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[27] Margiad Evans, *The Immortal Hospital* NLW, MS 23369C, p.1.
Further references to this manuscript are given after quotations in the text (*IH*).

Dying, she returns in memory and imagination to the place where she had felt most alive; the place which throughout her life has provided both inspiration and solace:

> Hill Hall is the scene where I am always at my strongest; best loved and most enthralled. Hill Hall holds my youth.... And once there, after the effort, an ethereal happiness permeates me and penetrates my restless mind. Some uninterrupted, unhurried, incorrupted [sic] peace the scenes bring to me which seem to soothe my young troubled self to sleep in my old body ' (*IH* p.37).

The significance of memories of Hill Hall as a place of solace is further reinforced by a reference in *A Ray of Darkness:*

> At night when fears were nearest....I would play that I was a child and write in my diary: 'On some such lovely morning, full of sun and thick dew, with waving branches, I'd get up and run down alone to the river and swim in the warm, heavy current that seemed tepid after the early air. The farm, Aunt Fran and Uncle Donavan' (*RD* pp.100-101).

Imagining being the child again at Hill Hall could provide a refuge for the fearful, suffering adult. As Susanna Egan remarks, 'Suffering, illness and death go to work on the body and determine its narratives'[28]. In Evans's case her illness and suffering cause her to look back to her childhood in the narratives she produces in order to rediscover a sense of identity.

Identity and place

P. J. Eakin suggests that 'there is frequently a special order of experience in the life itself that for the autobiographer is inseparably linked to the discovery and invention of identity'[29]. Evans recounts just such an experience in *The Immortal Hospital.* In 1918, having lost his job, Godfrey Whistler decided to take his nine-year-old daughter,

[28] Susanna Egan, *Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p.6.
[29] Eakin, (1985), p.226.

Peggy, with him on a visit to Benhall Farm to see his sister, Annie Lane, and her husband, Douglas. Before leaving on the Sunday afternoon, father and daughter went for a walk across the meadows to the river. This experience was epiphanic for Peggy who describes it in *The Immortal Hospital* as a moment of destiny: 'He took me across meadows never seen before, never forgotten since, to the river's brink; and there on a spot which was in future to be one of "our" magical places, it seemed as if he stood me' (*IH* p.16). This is her earliest memory of Hill Hall, 'its countryside, its river Wye – above all its river' (*IH* p.16) and the emotion it inspires is 'like a premonition of passion. A passion to be fulfilled for many years, and never lost since' (*IH* p.16). Her father turns to leave, thinking she is following, but she cannot tear herself away from the river; gazing, she felt 'some powerful emotion began to rise in me, some desperate adoration'. This gives rise to a 'passion of tears' and a plea to her father, '"Oh don't, don't take me away from this place. Oh Dad can't I stay here?"' (*IH* p.17).

Both Evans's biographers, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan and Moira Dearnley, attach great weight to this event, describing it in the opening pages of their studies as a defining moment for the writer; both quote the phrase 'premonition of passion'[30]. Despite the distance of forty years separating the writer of *The Immortal Hospital* from the child of nine she remembers, Evans's emotional experience on the banks of the Wye seems to have been a defining moment of self-perception; it resonates down the years in her writing. In her journal eighteen years later she expresses her despair when the family is faced with having to leave Lavender Cottage, Bridstow where they had settled in 1920, just up the road from Benhall and the river:

> Leave this house and leave this place where I was born? Yes though I'm 27 and I came here when I was twelve I was born here....I went near the river. It seemed to flow between my breasts from some deep central love that would make it blood to

[30]Dearnley, p.2; Lloyd-Morgan, p.8.

leave the lovely river. It's mine. This country's mine....My very soul lives here (April 1936)[31].

Her feeling of passionate attachment is clear: the river seems to actually become part of her body, flowing between her breasts. Her close identification with this 'magical place' continues; in a journal entry for January 18th 1949, she writes, 'There's a feeling when I go away from Herefordshire that I'm cast out of my body'[32].

As discussed in Chapter 5, a sense of profound communion between her body and the earth pervades *Autobiography* (1943), linked to the river and countryside around Benhall. She associates time spent with Aunt Nan as a child with a special acuity of vision which she has since lost and is attempting to re-capture[33]. Later in *Autobiography*, she addresses her sister Sian, reminding her of the special places of their childhood in and around Benhall: 'Sian, do you remember – how dearly do you remember? –the Mountain, Meredyth's Field, Katy's Meadow, the Bank, the Gap?'(p. 105). This line reappears as the epigraph of a poem 'To My Sister, Sian', written years later while Evans was in hospital and published in a collection of poems entitled *A Candle Ahead* (1956). In this poem, with 'Nature and Time' against her, she again returns in her memory to the river:

> Nature and Time are against us now:
> no more we leap up the river like salmon,
> nor dive through its fishy holes
> sliding along its summer corridor
> with all the water from Wales [34].

In her autobiographical writing, Evans returns repeatedly to these scenes from her childhood. P. J. Eakin suggests that

> the act of composition may be conceived as a mediating term in the autobiographical enterprise, reaching back into the past not merely to recapture but to repeat the

[31] Evans, *Arabella's Voice* NLW MS 23577C, pp.62a-63.
[32] Margiad Evans, NLW MS 40.
[33] Margiad Evans, *Autobiography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1943), p.81.
[34] Margiad Evans, 'To My Sister Sian', in *A Candle Ahead* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956), p.25.

> psychological rhythms of identity formation and reaching forward into the future to fix the structure of this identity in a permanent self-made existence as literary text[35].

In the texts presented as autobiography, Evans fixes her identity as a writer inspired by communion with the natural world; through memory she re-experiences the emotions elicited by the Herefordshire countryside and the effect these had on her sense of self. Eakin sees 'autobiography' as a decisive phase of the drama of self-definition. I would argue that this becomes the more urgent when the writer is faced with the end of her life.

In *The Immortal Hospital* the narrator recalls how, after her first visit to her Herefordshire relatives, she stored memories of the fields and river for a year; they are dormant yet potent to console, 'through many unchildish sins and unchildish repentance, I would repeat: "They are There"' (*IH* p.17). Then she is sent back to stay at Benhall for a year along with her younger sister, Sian. She describes how she 'came to my Paradise, my Immortal Hospital' (*IH* p.18). Once Uncle Donavan lifted her trunk down from the cart, 'Paradise had begun' (*IH* p.18). Robert Coe remarks that the vision of Paradise lost is only truly powerful as a motif, 'when it is given life and intensity by some other force...when it is felt as the source of something supremely valuable or significant in the present[36]. The significance of this paradise for Evans is that it is the location of the birth of herself as a writer. This is indicated by the fact that these recollections are presented as those of Margiad rather than Peggy; they are the writer's memoirs.

The remembrance of her time spent at Benhall, which appears in *A Ray of Darkness* (pp.100-1), quoted above, is introduced by a reference to writing:

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[35] Eakin, (1985), p.225.
[36] Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p.62.

> At nights when the fears were nearest, and my book untouched for days, seemed to spread and spread its unrolling thoughts before me on the candlelight, I would play that I was a child and write in my diary...

The writer, silenced by the fear and anxiety induced by her seizures, can free herself from this constraint and continue to write if she pretends to be the child, Margiad, happy and loved at Benhall[37].

Book: the birth of the writer

The self that Evans constructs in *The Immortal Hospital* is a portrait of herself as the child who would become a writer. She recalls how she was called 'dreamy' as a child, which meant that she 'liked to read and write and make up stories about places and our cousins' old dolls' (*IH* p.4); she was 'passive, bookish' and lived 'in other people's lives' (*IH* p.33). The healing power of the immortal hospital has a great deal to do with the relationship formed between Aunt Fran and Margiad who 'having been passed over as "hopeless" and "dreamy"' was preferred by Aunt Fran over her sister and cousins. Being a favourite with her Aunt, 'restored that strength that the very minute epileptic attacks I was already beginning to be aware of were undermining' (*IH* p.9).

Evans, while establishing herself as a 'bookish' child, nevertheless expresses her dissatisfaction with her achievement in the text she is composing. In this way, *The Immortal Hospital* displays a Modernist preoccupation with its own composition. Drawing a comparison between herself and her sister, Sian, she notes that as a child Sian was active whereas she was contemplative; Sian would scramble up a tree while she would just look at it. She speculates that these characteristics appear in their adult

[37] References to her time at Benhall also appear in her fiction, another example of 'aesthetic autobiography'. *The Wooden Doctor* opens with a reference to Arabella and Esther having spent a year living with an Aunt and Uncle; Arabella and Esther reappear in the short story 'The Old and The Young'. They are nieces of Mrs Payne of Ell Hall. In 'The Lost Fisherman' Emily recalls 'that one generous year of childhood with her aunt....One by one her passions were being lost, but this – this spirit of place, this identification of self with unregarded loveliness and joy – seemed, after a dormant cycle, to be becoming her life', *The Old and the Young*, p. 85.

art: Sian becomes a painter, 'perhaps her painting such subjects has something of the active participation in them, which my writing searches for but cannot find means to achieve' (*IH* p.33). The adult writer is dissatisfied with her attempts to capture the essence of her childhood, especially its significant places:

> I have often and often tried in various works to arrive exactly at the profundity in children's play places – the meaning is too subtle and acute for anyone who is not a very swift poet to catch. That moment when image and object, or thought and illustration, suddenly rings two bells in unison has never happened when writing on this subject and I am aware that I am merely writing round it (*IH* p.32).

Virginia Woolf expresses similar frustrations when describing her very early memories of being a child in the nursery at Talland House in St. Ives: 'I could spend hours trying to write that as it should be written, in order to give the feeling which is even at this moment very strong in me[38]. Both writers perceive that their identities are rooted in memories of childhood, and both can return to these scenes in their imagination: just as Evans can return to being little Margiad at Hill Hall, so Woolf can 'At times...go back to St Ives...completely'[39], but both acknowledge the difficulty of representing those memories accurately in their writing.

Woolf sees 'the past – as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions'[40]; similarly Evans's perception is of childhood memories as a series of inter-connecting rooms or chambers: 'Writing about childhood one channel leads into another, as in one of those huge prehistoric caves: and each chamber, decorated with its fanciful drawings more absorbing than the last' (*IH* pp.4-5). Evans gives an example of how this works: 'If I write the words "the old playroom" there comes on me a sense of so many things....enough memories in that one room alone to make up a whole person'(*IH* p.5). Here she neatly expresses her sense that her identity is constituted from

[38] Woolf, p.79.
[39] Woolf, p.80.
[40] Ibid. p.81.

her past and the corollary that these memories are linked, as they are for Woolf, to a special, magical place.

After another series of recollections, Evans writes, 'So chamber leads into chamber, passage into passage of remembrance, as in a garden the smell of lilac leads us on to the violets and the first pansies' (*IH* pp.15-16). Evans's use of linking rooms or chambers to represent memories recalls similar imagery in the illness narratives where she compares the body assailed by an epileptic fit to a room in which a catastrophe is occurring: with the onset of a fit, when speech and action are impossible, 'one turns round or away from helpers, if they are present, if not, from the presence of the appalling calamity in the room which is the body' (*RD* p.155). Interconnecting rooms are a particularly potent image for Evans because they are linked to her perception that her epilepsy may have been caused by a split in her personality between the artist and the domestic wife and mother. She describes in *A Ray of Darkness* how just before falling into a fit

> The light-hearted notion took me...that there were so many people in me to choose from and so many rooms I could go into all at once that there must be immunity or sanctuary in one. Also that my always falling in a doorway...was actual proof of a two-way life (*RD* pp.173-4).

Separate rooms reflect her fragmented sense of self, which is linked in her mind to her illness. A similar idea appears in *The Immortal Hospital*:

> But just as certain parts of our beings get shut up forever in some rooms or places, never to escape but to make the nervous return again and again to their imprisonment all through life, so is the essence of joy, happiness and freedom bottled in others (*IH* p.37).

There is a sense that parts of her identity are dangerous and endangered; these are the parts which make her vulnerable to illness and suffering. She can escape or find relief from her pain if she can move from the dangerous room to the rooms containing 'joy, happiness and freedom'; these are the rooms she revisits in her recollections of childhood at Benhall.

Suzette Henke suggests that autobiography written in the face of impending disintegration of the body through disease 'reintegrates the various selves dispersed and beleaguered by illness'[41]. By adjusting her image from that of separate rooms to one of interconnecting chambers to reflect the linked chain of memory, Evans attempts to provide a continuity of self through her childhood memories. According to Mary Warnock, 'The sense of personality each of us has is a sense of continuity through time'[42]. In a journal entry for 23rd November 1949, which pre-dates her first seizure, but at a time when she clearly felt ill, she records, 'I'm feeling very low in health. Haven't any continuation. Everything is disconnected from me and from everything else. Being today, is just a slight ache in the cheek, under the right eye'[43]. The onset of epilepsy exacerbated this sense of discontinuity; of her first fit she says, 'I had fallen through Time, Continuity and Being' (*RD* p.78). In the immortal hospital she seeks to restore the sense of continuity which throughout her life had evaded her and which became immeasurably exacerbated by her seizures.

The Immortal Hospital is also about being Margiad Evans, the writer, a whole rather than fragmented self. In *A Ray of Darkness,* she expressed her conviction that her disease had been caused by a split in her personality. In a letter to Derek Savage, she writes that she believes she is suffering because she has not allowed herself to work out her destiny:

> The disease is physical, but might not have developed to this awful pitch if I had been strong, consistent and soothing to myself instead of weak, aggravating and painful. Margiad Evans has got up in fury and means to drive Peggy Whistler insane. I must be Margiad Evans and Peggy Whistler will live to be happy and normal yet (22nd May 1951)[44].

Being Margiad Evans means continuing to write and by writing her own story she simultaneously constructs her identity as writer; it is a performative act. As long as she

[41] Henke, p.117.
[42] Mary Warnock, *Memory* (First published London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1987; repr. 1989), p. 75.
[43] NLW, MS 41.
[44] Margiad Evans, NLW, File 10, Savage Letters.

can continue to tell her story, as she does in both *The Churstons* and *The Immortal Hospital* she retains a sense of who she is. Concentrating on her writing will appease Margiad's fury perhaps enabling Peggy to survive a little longer.

Evans draws attention to herself as writer in *The Immortal Hospital*. She discusses the difficulty of capturing her memories accurately and she acknowledges that her vision of the past may involve imaginative embellishment of the experience, 'My recollections of a single year at Hill Hall with our cousins, Aunt Fran and Uncle Donavan, are more lustrous than the truth and clearer than any real happiness could ever be' (*IH* p.11). She also, in the closing section, refers to the fact that she has been selective about the memories she has chosen to describe: 'There is no completeness in this short manuscript. Nor did I intend there to be' (*IH* p.55). She admits that there are many more memories, but to include them would diminish the whole:

> ...yet to give too much would destroy the essentiality of the whole, which again like light leaves unoccupied colours or forms in the tender pictures painted by the English watercolourists where, suddenly, it may be at the very heart of the scene, the artist's hand has deliberately halted, and left space unmarked to speak of luminousness (*IH* p.55).

As a writer and an artist, she is aware of the power of silence and space which allows the reader or observer to engage imaginatively with the artistic creation.

When writing *The Churstons* and *The Immortal Hospital*, Evans was dying from a disease which radically threatened her sense of self. The seizures were lacunae in which she lost 'Time, Continuity and Being' (*RD* p.78). Suzette Henke suggests that this type of psychic fragmentation can be seen as a 'disruption and dismemberment of the Lacanian imaginary vision of an integrated self which is essential to an individual's sense of agency and subjectivity'[45]. Evans's late narratives are her attempt to restore her sense of herself and to recapture an illusion of wholeness by returning in memory and

[45] Henke, p.xvi.

imagination to scenes of her childhood. As Henke remarks, 'To be an effective being in the world one must cling to the Lacanian myth of a coherent identity despite its status as a fictional construct.... The life-writing project generates a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency'[46]. The very act of writing restores agency to the dying woman and a sense of her identity as writer. The reader of *The Churstons* and *The Immortal Hospital* gains a sense of the healing power of the remembrance of moments of being from Evans's intensely remembered childhood. As Mary Warnock suggests, 'Memory comes as a saviour. Like a Messiah, it is to save us from the otherwise inevitable destruction brought by death and time'[47].

Death and time caught up with Evans too soon and her debilitating illness robbed her of the ability to produce fully integrated, coherent narratives in her final years. In January 1958, two months before her death, Evans's mother wrote to Gwyn Jones telling him that her daughter was no longer capable of replying to his letters: 'She is heavily drugged and though she speaks a little she is very confused and her mind is elsewhere most of the time'[48]. One hopes that in her mind she was once again a child by the River Wye.

Despite their shortcomings, it is clear that Evans wanted *The Churstons* and *The Immortal Hospital* to be published, to put words out into the world to the end. Even though she demonstrates, in the character of Adelaide, an awareness that there may be no one who listens or cares about her dying words, she knows that she, unlike Adelaide, has a daughter to whom these texts are dedicated. Cassandra Davies is her mother's literary executor; it is partly thanks to her that Evans's words are still reaching readers.

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[46] Henke, p.xvi.
[47] Warnock, p.141.
[48] Lloyd-Morgan, p.139.

Conclusion

'For better or worse, we all exist and only exist within the circumference of the stories we tell about ourselves: outside that circumference human beings know nothing and can know nothing'[1].

'And if I unintentionally reveal more than I know I am revealing, it is so much more valuable to the reader who understands'[2].

In this thesis I have analysed the stories Margiad Evans told about herself and shown the continuity and development of her thinking through her novels, autobiography, the illness narratives and in her private writing. Benefiting from insights taken from autobiographical and psychoanalytic theory, I have developed new ways of approaching this very diverse body of work, revealing its richness.

The dominant thread traceable through the novels and continuing into the autobiographical texts is Evans's desire to construct for herself an identity as a writer. In *Country Dance*, Ann writes a diary which speaks for her, telling her story after her death. At the end of *The Wooden Doctor*, Arabella triumphantly publishes a book. This achievement justifies all the pain and suffering she has experienced; it also reflects the experience of her creator. In writing and publishing *The Wooden Doctor*, Evans creates an identity for herself that cannot be threatened by humiliation or by her body's suffering. Her novel allows her an identity predicated on its own creation, that of author. Phoebe, in *Turf or Stone*, writes a journal the style and tone of which echo Evans's own; the style of this novel also has echoes of Evans's literary heroes as she attempts to situate herself in a literary tradition. In *Creed*, the last of the novels, the author's voice emerges directly, notably in her Preface where she articulates her perception of the relationship between author text and reader: 'What I offer you as reading is real, though

[1] James Olney, 'All in One Story', *The Sewanee Review* 95 (1987): 134-135, cited in Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.221.
[2] Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness* (London: John Calder, 1978), p.55.

I outstrip each page and at the end am different'[3]. Evans suggests that the reader will have access to her real self through the text while acknowledging that she, the author, will have been changed by the act of writing. Creating the text, as with *The Wooden Doctor*, is a performative act: it creates and reinforces her identity as writer.

Intimately connected with Evans's ideology of writing is her perception of herself as embodied. It is clear that she not only perceives body as text but also intuits how the text might come to stand in for the suffering body. In *Country Dance* Ann's wound acts as a sign which can be read by others; it tells of violence and pleads for justice. Arabella's suffering body is central to the meaning of her story. Through her illness she unconsciously expresses her desire for the doctor and gains the attention from him that she craves. But for Evans, the book can also have all the attributes of a body. A book must live, 'have bones, muscles and a beating heart' if it is to be successful[4]. This important connection between body and book is vividly conveyed in journal entries, contemporary with the period when she was writing the novels. In this quotation she again employs imagery of the body to convey how essential writing is for her; it is like her blood, she could not function without it:

> This book is full of my touch, almost my living heart – still it has been lying near me under my head. I have carried it with me and often without opening it I have deeply written hours in it. It has been like my clothes to me, like my food, with me like my blood and never left behind (June, 1936)[5].

Evans dedicated her first explicitly autobiographical work, *Autobiography*, to her husband, telling him that, 'it's more than dedicated it's our own child'[6]. In this text she articulates her sense of communion between her body and the earth as well as meditating at length on the difficulty of finding a language which can accurately convey her sensations, but there is no doubt of the urgency of this task for her. She employs

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[3] Margiad Evans, *Creed* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), Preface.
[4] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 23366D p.141.
[5] Margiad Evans, *Arabella's Voice* NLW MS 23577C, p.90.
[6] NLW File 12, Michael Williams Letters October 17th, 1944.

metaphors of birth to express what writing means to her, 'Each time I take hold of a pen it's like being born'[7].

The metaphorical thread linking body and book, birth and writing is continued in the pathographical texts. *A Ray of Darkness* is an account of the onset of Evans's epilepsy, but it is also a narrative about its own birth and, in parallel, the birth of a flesh and blood child, her daughter, Cassandra. We are left in no doubt by the author of *A Ray of Darkness* that the production of the book is more important to her than the birth of her child. Thus, as Evans succumbed to a disease which put her body beyond her mind's control, the ability to construct herself in language assumed even greater importance until finally, in the late texts written when she knew she was dying, she expresses both the hope that these words will outlive her corporeal body, and the anxiety that there will be no one to listen or understand.

I have shown that Evans both constructs an identity as writer through her oeuvre and also articulates how she uses writing to protect and defend her identity. Even before she was afflicted by serious illness, the compulsion to write in order to counteract feelings of inadequacy is vividly expressed:

> Quick. Quick before it's too late. I must write. Oh God it has come back – the sense of smallness, dullness, the weight that grinds my entrails. I lean forward and press my heart on the knife edge of this book (March, 1939)[8].

It is almost as if she is physically attempting to merge with the book, that somehow writing will deliver her from the smallness of self. When afflicted by major epileptic fits which render her literally speechless, she is convinced that writing will save her from the feelings of chaos and loss, 'I must start again on my Emily Brontë book. I must do

[7] Margiad Evans, *Autobiography* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1943), p.24.
[8] Ibid. p.133.

something to keep myself calm and decent'[9]. Evans wrote until she was overtaken by her disease and physically no longer able to continue. Writing confirmed that despite everything she could still be Margiad Evans, author, the precious identity she had created for herself.

What emerges from my exploration of how Evans constructs herself as an author and the development of her personal, therapeutic ideology of writing, is a writer who can usefully be read not only in terms of the history of Modernism, but also who, because of the relativities and instabilities inherent in her texts, shares common ground with the sensibilities of Postmodernism. In Evans's texts identity is not fixed; while continually seeking to establish the identity of writer she also, in the novels, through a process of aesthetic autobiography, takes the circumstances of her troubled adolescence and young adulthood, including her problematic relationships with parents and lovers, and explores the effect of these experiences on identity. To do this, she creates a range of characters: Ann, Arabella, Phoebe, Easter and Menna who can be read as alter egos, through whom Evans explores aspects of herself, both the how and the why of who she is.

I have argued that identity is not fixed and all Evans's texts are pervaded by images of splitting and division. Various characters and Evans herself are seen as occupying liminal spaces, which are the territory of Modernism. In *Country Dance*, Ann represents the border which is both a geographical and metaphorical space; it is a region which offers Ann the possibility of inhabiting different aspects of herself, most significantly the self that responds to Olwen's beauty. This sexual borderland was inhabited by Evans herself who fell in love with both Ruth and Michael. Her perception of herself as split is reflected in her adoption of different personas; she could be Peggy, Margiad and Arabella, and on occasions Emily Brontë. In the end, in *A Ray of*

[9] Margiad Evans, *A Ray of Darkness* (London: Arthur Baker, 1952; repr. London: John Calder, 1978), p.87.

Darkness, Evans articulates her sense of herself as radically spilt between Margiad Evans, the writer and Peggy Williams, wife and mother. Her inability, like Ann Goodman in *Country Dance*, to reconcile these sides of herself is what she sees as leading to her epilepsy.

A further border which is shifting and indistinct in Evans's writing, as I have shown, is that between fiction and autobiography. I have shown how fiction and autobiography merge in *The Wooden Doctor* and how she implicates herself in the other novels through her identification with certain characters and her exploration of relationships that closely mirror her own. In *The Churstons* again, fiction gives way to personal memoir. Both in the novels and in the texts she explicitly acknowledges as autobiography, Evans is exploring and developing her own identity. In this regard, I adhere to the argument advanced by Paul Jay quoted in my introduction (p.8) and reproduced here:

> the attempt to differentiate between autobiography and fictional autobiography is finally pointless. For if by 'fictional' we mean 'made up', 'created' or 'imagined' – something that is, which is literary and not 'real' –then we have merely defined the ontological status of any text, autobiographical or not[10].

As well as being difficult to categorise, Evans's texts also exhibit the self-reflexive consciousness of Modernism; they are about their own production. Evans's subject is always herself, but crucially herself as a writer intimately and passionately involved in the business of writing. This is explored through the writer heroine of *The Wooden Doctor*, through the authorial interventions in *Creed* and in its Preface and continues in the autobiographical texts.

Evans's use of experimental form in *Autobiography* invites comparisons with that used by Virginia Woolf. 'A Sketch of the Past' opens in April 1939; at the same time Evans was writing the nature diaries which would be incorporated into her

[10] Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.16.

Autobiography. Hermione Lee referring to Woolf's essay suggests that, 'Characteristically this is a daringly experimental new kind of life writing, in which the process with all its problems became part of the story'[11]. This could justifiably be used to describe Evans's text and I would argue that her innovation should be acknowledged alongside that of her more famous contemporary.

Evans broke further new ground with her pathographies. *A Ray of Darkness* is remarkable for being in the vanguard of the genre. It is still attracting the attention of the medical profession as one of a very few narratives which attempt to describe the sufferer's experience of an epileptic seizure[12]. Its unpublished sequel, *The Nightingale Silenced*, is also deeply concerned with the significance of its composition for the writer. Both vividly evoke Evans's perception that if she can continue to write then her identity can have some continuation despite the toll the disease is taking on her body.

The late texts demonstrate the writer's anxiety that her words will fall into the void. In a journal entry without an exact date, but known to have been written in the 1950s, she wrote:

> Ah how can I say what I mean, or if I said it what words would endure long enough? ...I want a testimony through the centre of the earth. That if anything human live in the mind of a million years it could dig and read what life meant to me[13].

The importance of these words as constituting her very self is expressed in a journal entry for 4th June, 1949. It is an entry that has motivated this study:

> Ah who with faded eye and interest wan will read over these words after me one day. Most likely no-one. Yet to destroy them would be to destroy what I was, what I thought and how my hand moved[14].

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[11] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, Introduced and Revised by Hermione Lee (London: Pimlico, 2002), p.xv.
[12] A. J. Larner, '*A Ray of Darkness*: Margiad Evans's account of her epilepsy (1952)', *Clinical Medicine*, 9 (2009), 193-4.
[13] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 23370D.
[14] Margiad Evans, NLW, MS 41.

Evans's deeply held desire was to find the words to communicate with those who would come after and she continued to seek them to the end; the nightingale was not, and has not been, silenced.

APPENDIX
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